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morpheme gives animators and developers unprecedented control over the look and feel of their animations in-game: blends, transitions, compression, etc. can all be previewed and modified graphically in morpheme:connect and live on the target platform.

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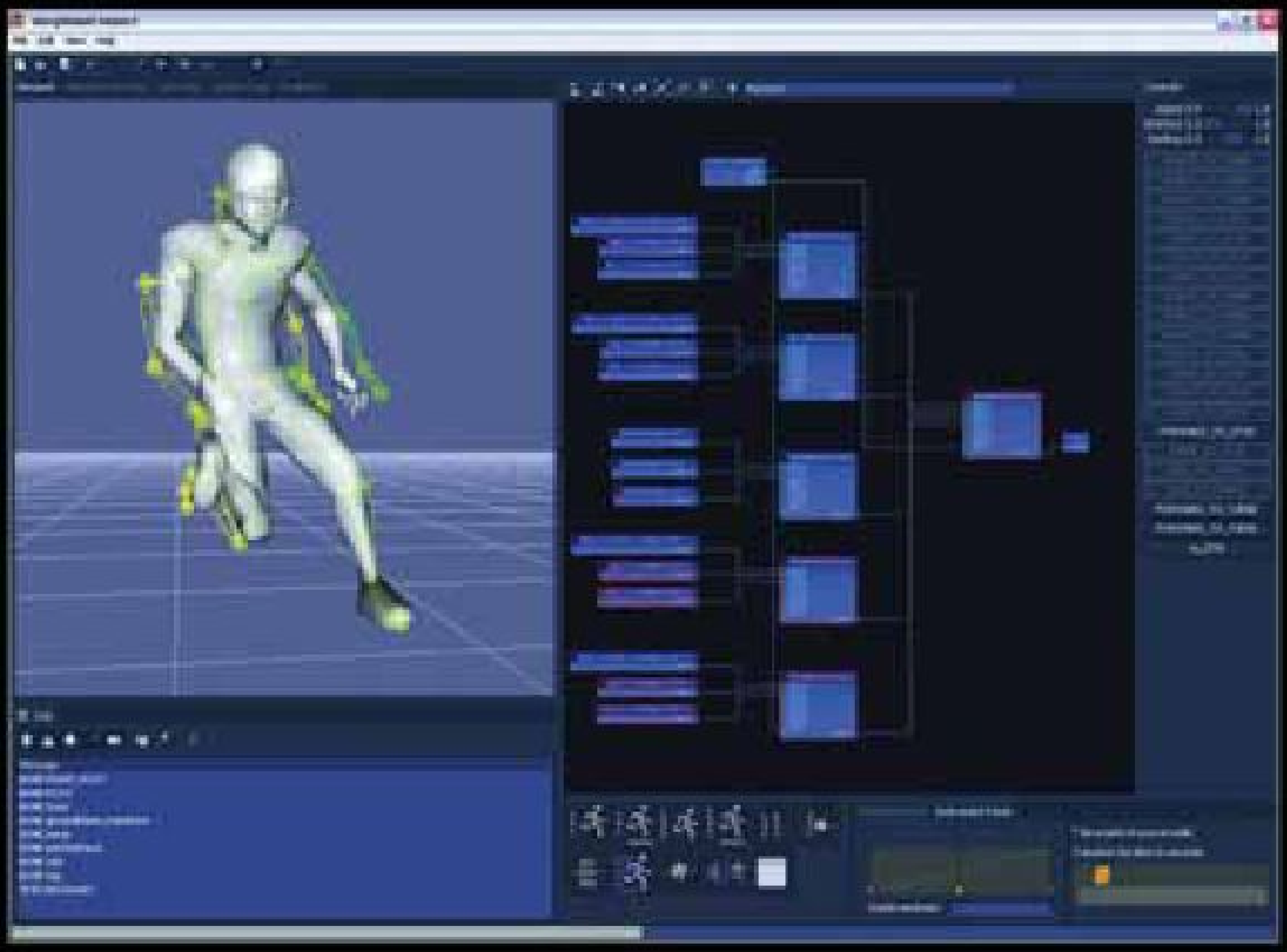
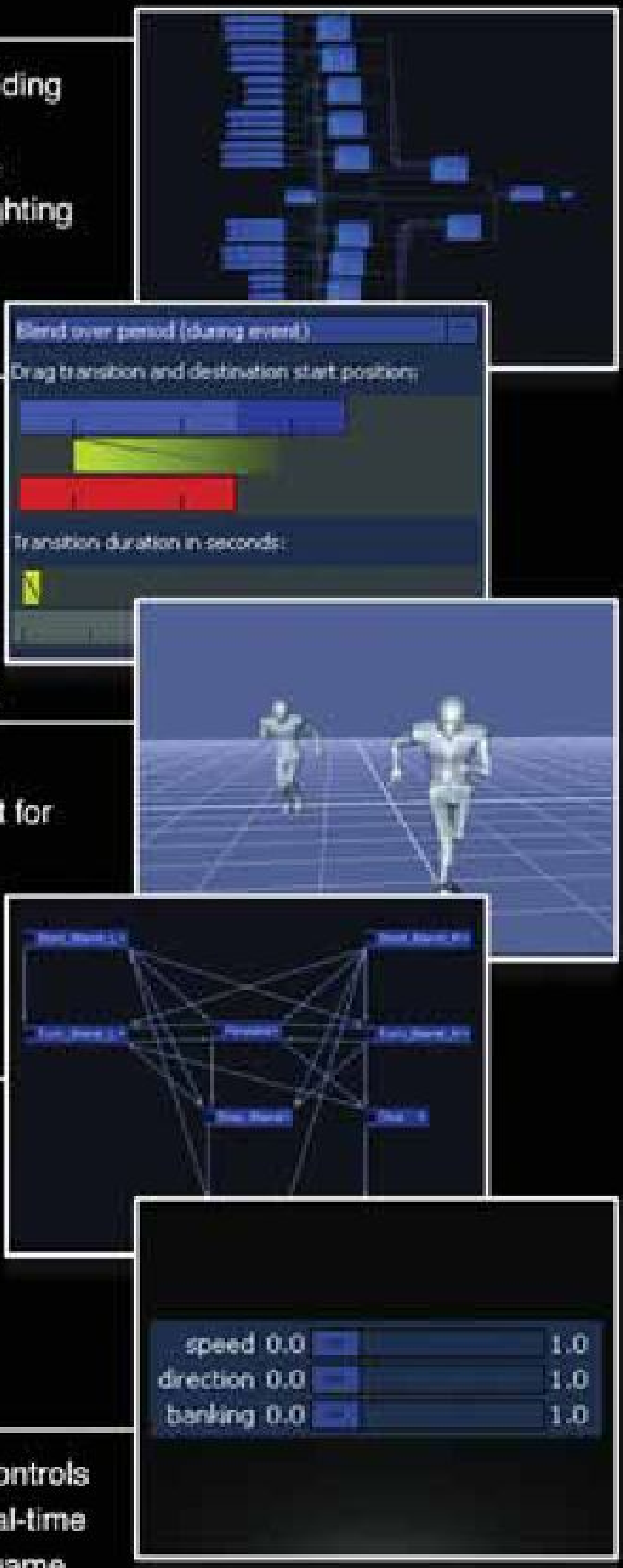




Blend over period (during event)
Drag transition and destination start position:
Transition duration in seconds:
speed 0.0 1.0
direction 0.0 1.0
banking 0.0 1.0

blend tree

Advanced graphical tools for building complex blend trees. Real-time visualization of animation source contribution through node highlighting

blending

Graphical control of transition blending between states in the transition graph

multiple characters

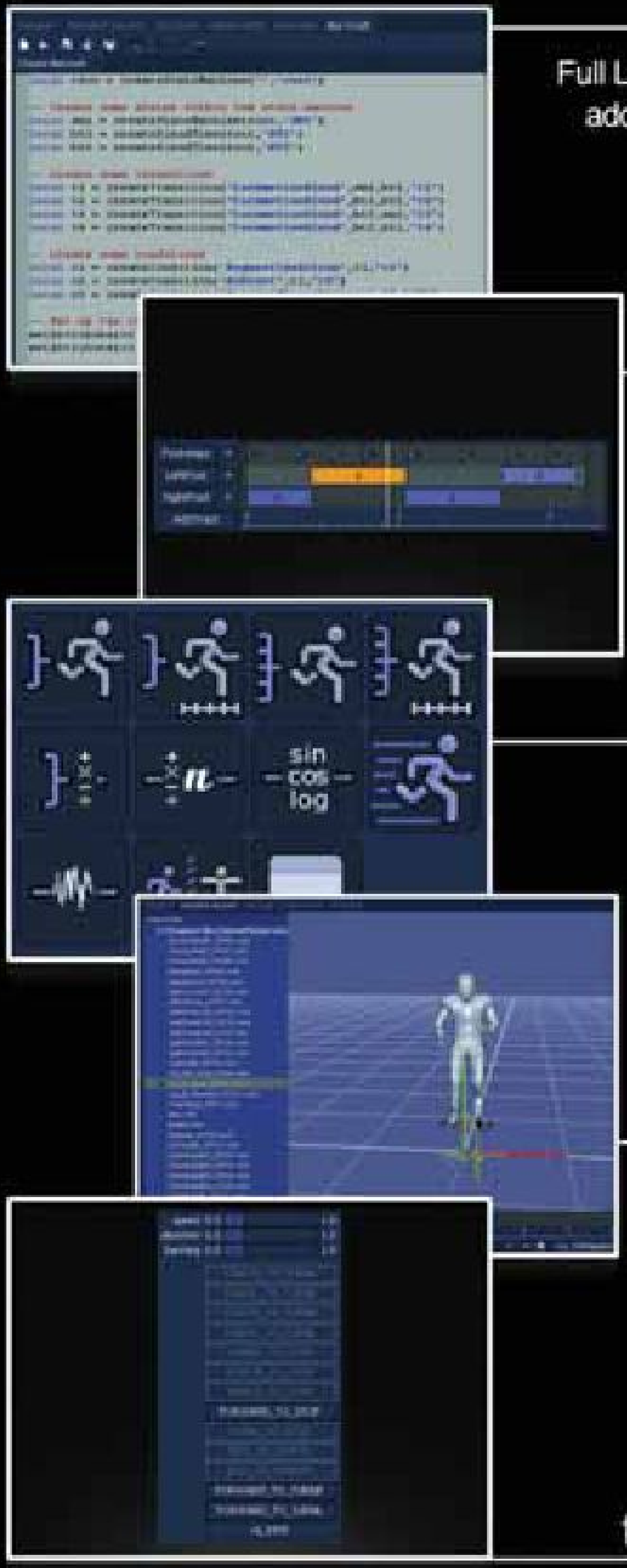
Visualization of multiple runtime characters in morpheme:connect for easy authoring and analysis of character interaction

network

Advanced graphical tools for creating and visualizing transition networks through drag-and-drop

control parameters

Exposure of custom high-level controls for entire animation system. Real-time manipulation through sliders or game pad controller



scripting

Full Lua scripting for automating tasks, adding AI logic or polling game pads for real-time input

timeline

Graphical mark up of animation data to add one-shot and duration events, for highlighting footfalls, sound effects, etc.

node palette

Advanced blend notes (time-warp) for dragging and dropping into transition network. Fully customizable node types through C++ and scripting

animation browser

Easy browsing and selection (drag & drop) of source animation. Animation list is automatically updated to reflect changed source files (after editing in Maya)

transition requests

Exposure of custom transition messages. In-tool emulation of interaction between morpheme:runtime and game AI system

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NATURALMOTION

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casualgaming.biz

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ALPHA

ADVENTURES IN GAMES DEVELOPMENT: NEWS, VIEWS & MORE

"There's no sign the East/West cultural divide will be conquered soon..."
Rick Gibson goes global, p17

Call to Action for small teams
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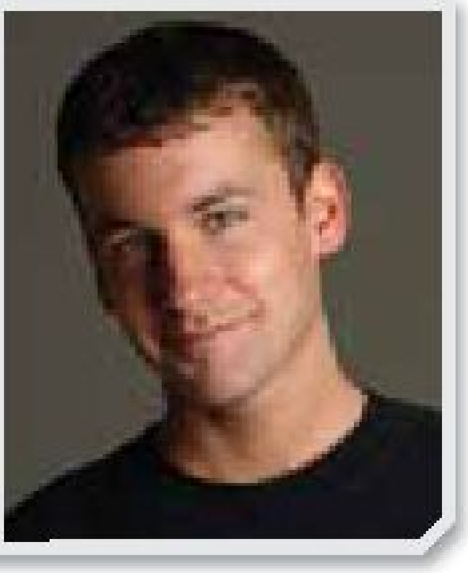

IP Profile: Jagex's Runescape
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Power List: Our exclusive studio ranking
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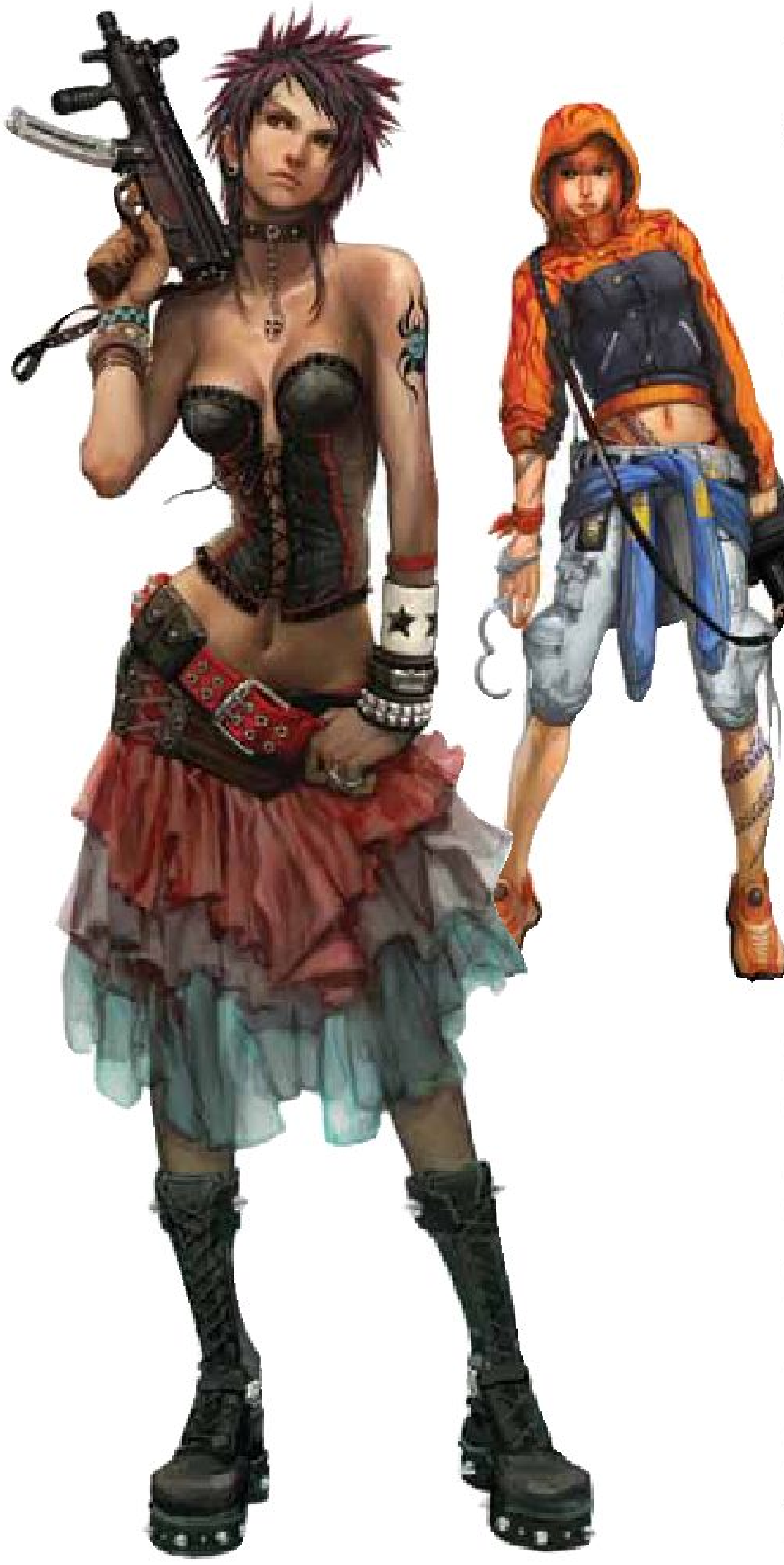
'Investors prefer independents'

Publisher-free developers can get further up the value chain as tide turns toward online games, says Realtime Worlds' Dave Jones



by Michael French

Dave Jones, CEO of Scottish studio Realtime Worlds, has said that investors' attitudes towards the games space are quickly changing – and that they value developers over publishers.

Speaking to *Develop* after the studio he founded confirmed a huge $50m series B funding round, the creator of *GTA* said that the increasing closeness between developers and their audience is helping draw in investment support.

"The online space is really starting to heat up – investors love that space, and love the online sustainability of online games," said Jones (*pictured above*). "And that's good for developers because it's not just about the publisher in terms of investment. As a developer we can get a lot closer to a customer and actually do a fair bit of the servicing and hosting ourselves."

Realtime Worlds is currently developing its first MMO, a cops and robbers game called *All Points Bulletin* (aka *APB – see artwork, left*) that hosts a raft of customisation and community features. As these kind of titles create more open, direct dialogues with gamers, Jones said that it was necessary for developers to start "thinking outside of the box a little bit" and have more diverse ideas ready for potential investors to fund because "the traditional market – especially for a developer – is going to be tough in terms of finding investment support".

> ***"The traditional market – especially for a developer – is going to be tough in terms of investment support..."***
> ***Dave Jones, Realtime Worlds***

In fact, Jones added, what's attracting investors is that developers can go solo and make a game from cradle to grave, with their financial backing, without a publisher.

Realtime has used some of the money from its investment round to buy back the global distribution rights to APB from publisher Korean publisher Webzen so it can handle the game's release itself. And the ultimate plan is to build up the studio so it can independently decide the fate of its MMO, selecting publishing partners where relevant and building up its internal resource when it comes to the customer service and hardware demands made by connected titles.

"We're not doing everything ourselves off the bat. We've done some work with Webzen and will have partners going forward, especially with APB," added Jones.

"But investors like the fact that we can actually get further and further up the value chain which, in terms of retail stuff, is usually impossible for a developer. So I think the interest from investors is good news for developers. We all have more options available to us now."

www.realtimeworlds.com

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Editorial

As one studio closes…

April seemed to be a particularly cruel month for studios in North America. Independents Pseudo, Castaway and Stormfront, plus Activision's Underground Developments all confirmed that they were set for closure.

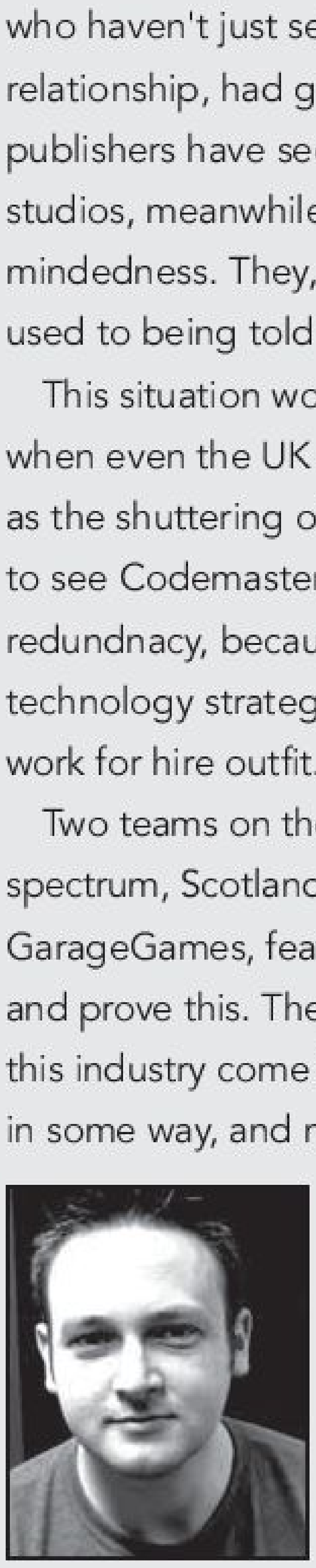
Unfortunate times – you can probably pinpoint the exact moment in the financial year when all these teams found themselves at the brink, with publisher projects cancelled or coming to an end, and no other company prepared to sign a deal with them.

Like many journalists I can trot out the cliche that the hardest times when you report on a commercial industry is covering topics that involve jobs and businesses being lost. However – and this may well prove to be an unpopular comment – maybe this time it was a wake up call for some independents that was long overdue?

We all know of the industry's new attitude towards development talent. From EA to Gamecock, championing the studio is in favour, and rightly so. Such attitude changes will have been spurred by the activities of a number of independents – the Valves, Harmonixs, Epics and Bungies of the world – those who haven't just settled for a traditional publishing relationship, had good ideas and shown growth when publishers have seen revenues remain flat. Other studios, meanwhile, are left to their narrow-mindedness. They, frankly, have spent too long getting used to being told what to do by publishers.

This situation would go some way to explain why when even the UK is faced with a studio closure, such as the shuttering of Sega Racing Studio, it's no surprise to see Codemasters swoop in to save the team from redundnacy, because its smaller team and proprietary technology strategy was worth something more than a work for hire outfit.

Two teams on the opposite ends of that geographical spectrum, Scotland's Realtime Worlds and Oregon's GarageGames, feature in our news section this month and prove this. They show that the success stories of this industry come from those who dare to be different in some way, and not follow the crowd.



Michael French
michael.french@intentmedia.co.uk

Michael

GarageGames'

Browser games don't need to be developed with just casual players

by Ed Fear

It might seem like just another online portal, but GarageGames' new browser-based game site InstantAction is aiming to open a whole new world of opportunity for smaller game developers – and usher in a brand new game development methodology.

GarageGames, best known for its range of indie-developer focused tools such as the Torque engine, unveiled InstantAction as part of a multi-million dollar investment from US media mogul Barry Diller's IAC operation late last year.

The site aims to divorce browser-based games from the casual gaming stereotype and target the core gamer demographic, by marrying high-end technology with the play-anywhere mentality of browser gaming and the comprehensive community and back-end of something like Steam or Xbox Live.

> ***"The potential numbers [of consumers] are orders of magnitude bigger than any console…"***
> ***Josh Williams, GarageGames***

And this GarageGames says will offer huge potential for small teams to develop innovative, low-risk games that can attract a large numbers of active fans. By only requiring a browser and a free, easy-to-install plug-in, "you're leveraging basically the largest game digital distribution platform in the world – PCs connected to the web," GarageGames CEO Josh Williams told us during a visit to London last month.

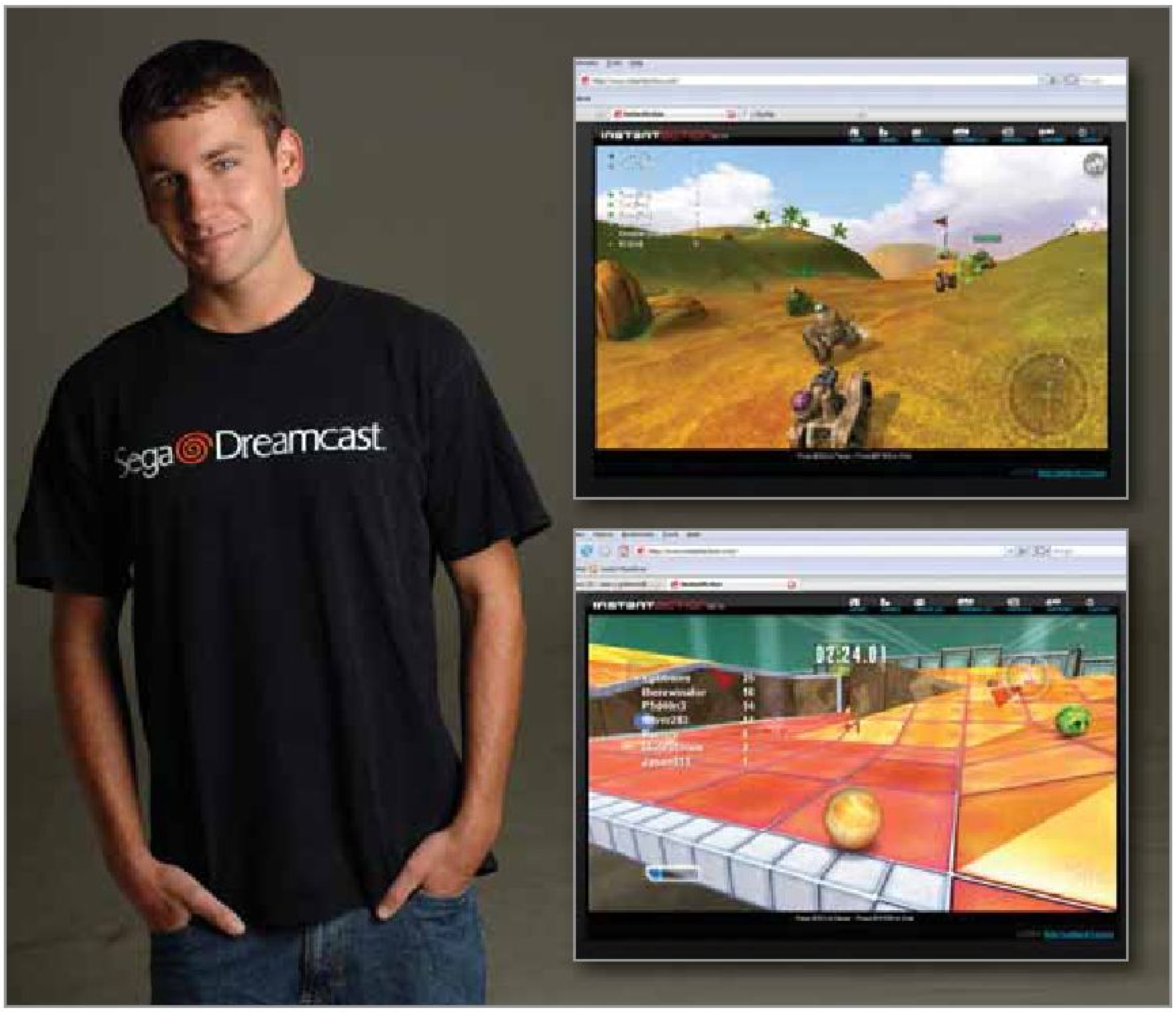
"So the potential numbers are orders of magnitude bigger than any console."

InstantAction allows games of any technical background to run within the browser, freeing developers from the limitations of something like Flash. "We've got games running on Torque, but also on Java, Python, and even a couple running on Unreal Engine," added GarageGames' Andy Yang.

A number of the new studios which GarageGames is working with tend to consist

call to Action

in mind, says American independent as it touts new portal to studios



GamesGames' InstantAction browser technology can run games of varying complexity, says CEO Josh Williams

of a handful of ex-industry personnel, dissatisfied with working as a small cog in a large machine.

"They're sick of it, they think making games isn't fun anymore – or at least not as much as it used to be," explained Williams. "We've got a few teams like this that can still make really core stuff, things they dreamed about making when they were kids, but with smaller teams and less time."

Although a managed platform like XBLA, the firm says small teams will be able leverage the platform to produce innovative, low-risk games much quicker. Plus, the site's community features mean participating developers can build a reputation by echoing how the biggest Internet phenomena have started small and steadily expanded based on consumer feedback.

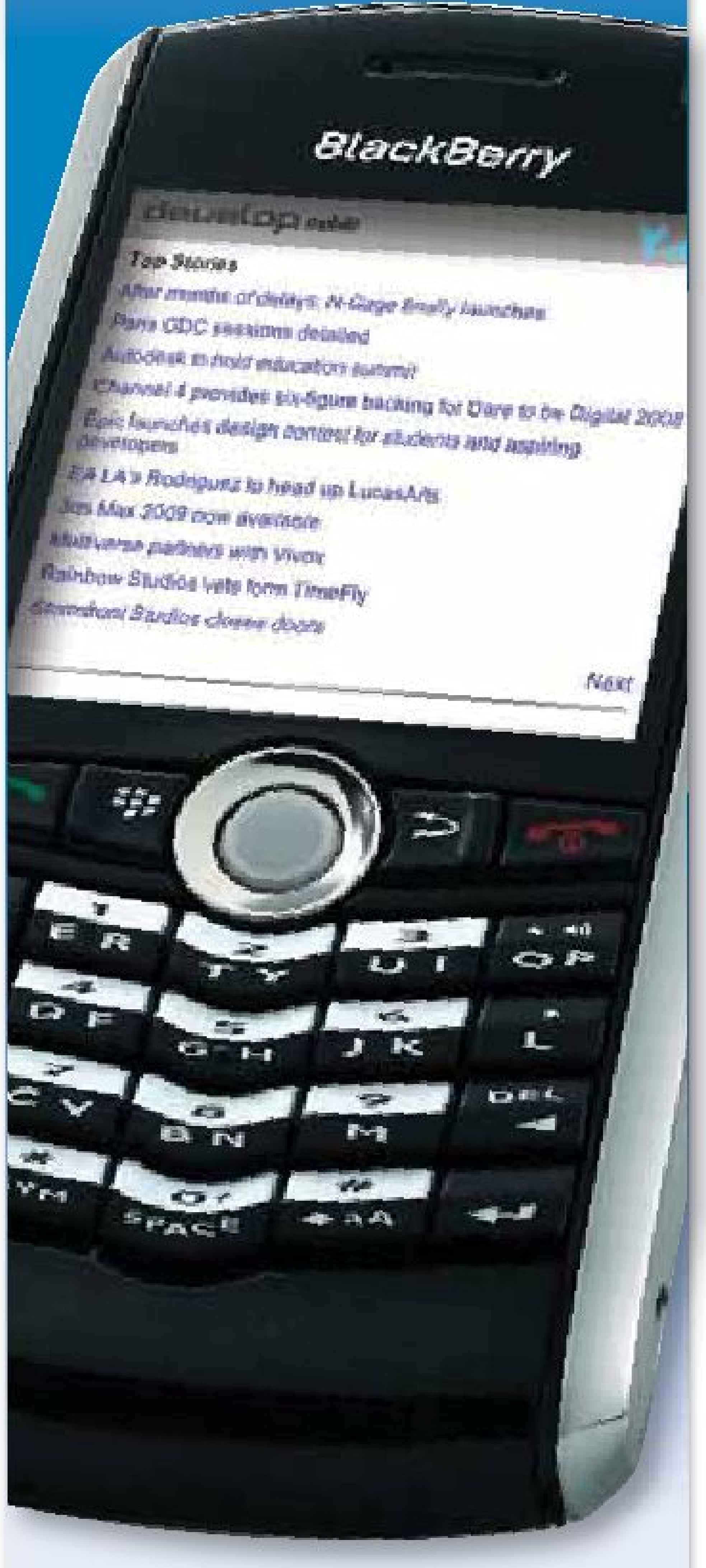
"Think about the biggest successes on the web, like Yahoo or Google – they really let their users tell them what was and what wasn't working, and shaped the product like that," said Andy Yang.

"Being online is just a smarter way to make games," said Williams. "You can start out with something that's quite low-risk, a fairly small tight experience, and launch it and find your audience.

"But then you can grow it with your community, with your players, which just lowers the risk all the way along. Plus, when you're actually selling the game there's all sorts of ways of making money – you can be free-to-play and then sell add on content, or sell services or whatever. You can be really creative in terms of business models, which is a really cool little creative challenge that I think developers will find interesting."

GarageGames is also banking on attracting developers with a royalty rate 'significantly above' traditional publishing and the chance to keep their IP alongside the ability to directly communicate with their audience. Instant Action will be keeping extensive metrics and analysis of play habits, to show details such as how many people play a certain level, the percentage of those that complete it and even how many people are recommending it to friends based on particular level.

While a casual portal might have seemed a tangential venture for a lo-fi technology company like GarageGames, the company says its slogan – 'changing the way games are made and played' – remains the key goal. But by simultaneously providing a new frontier for online games and opening a new channel for developers to focus on shorter yet technologically unrestrained games – all while still benefiting from the fairer online royalty rates – before long the team might have to change the mission statement to the past tense 'we *changed* the way games are made and played'.
www.instantaction.com



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WorldView

Our regular round up of development stories from across the globe...

//comments

"Games are journeys of the imagination, in the same broad genre of escapism as comic books, films and watching James May reach 250mph in a Bugatti Veyron on Top Gear..."

The Times' remarkably level-headed defence of games inspires a treat: The Richard Hammond Crash Simulator

"Taking over the Sega Racing Studio could take our development headcount to over the 350 mark, creating a massive force in British game development..."

Codemasters Studios VP Gavin Cheshire lets slip the firm's secret plans for world domination. All hail the New British Empire...

"Spending too long, staying in and playing any video game is not good... I always tell my children to get out on a sunny day. But I do my stretching on Wii Fit. They work together..."

Nintendo legend Shigeru Miyamoto realises mid-sentence that, actually, he's meant to be promoting Wii Fit

NORTH AMERICA

April wasn't a good month for North American developers, be they independent or publisher-owned, with four studios shutting their doors across the US.

Stormfront, headed by industry conference circuit faithful Don Daglow, had to let its 33 staff go after having problems securing future projects and seeing 'no revenue' from its most recent project.

Several days later Pseudo Interactive, developer of the *Full Auto* series, closed its Toronto base following the cancellation of a project it was making for Eidos – heavily rumoured to be a new *Carmageddon* title that was caught in the crossfire of new SCi CEO Phil Rogers' culling of 15 in-development titles.

That same day it was also reported that Castaway Entertainment, a studio founded in 2003 by ex-Blizzard staff, would also close. In its few years of business the studio had only released one title, the Xbox Live Arcade advergame *Yaris*, due to a number of its other titles being cancelled.

Finally, Activision closed Underground, one of its internal studios, towards the end of the month. It had been working on a PS3 port of Splash Damage's *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, and was allegedly making an action entry into the *Call of Duty* series.

www.developmag.com

MASSACHUSETTS, USA

Rockstar Games has grown its stable of studios further with the acquisition of Mad Doc Software.

The studio, which made *Bully: Scholarship Edition*, has a particular focus on AI and networking tech, and previously licensed its Mad3D Game Engine and Mad AI middleware to other developers.

"Bringing them within the Rockstar Games family will enhance our core technology and further support our commitment to creating progressive gaming experiences," said Sam Houser, founder of Rockstar Games.

www.rockstargames.com

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MUMBAI, INDIA

SCEE has kick-started a new strategy aimed at driving the games industry in India, saying it will give free development kits to projects that it deems to have potential, including full technical support – and has signed a deal for a game based on the Hindu Hanuman monkey god.

Sony recently held a DevStation event in India to help drive awareness of development practices, in which 50 developers from some 13 companies attended to learn about formats including the PS2.

The format launched in India in 2003, and in industry terms the territory has in recent years found itself the primary target for outsourcing. Now, SCEE said, it wants to help those firms go beyond service work to full development and serve the local market.

"There is a lot of talent in India and their work can be exported worldwide," Zeno Colaco, SCEE's vice-president of publisher and developer relations, told Indian site Sify Business.

www.scee.net

SHANGHAI, CHINA

Disney Interactive Studios has bought its sixth studio, Chinese firm Gamestar.

Founded in 2002, the firm employs 90 staff across studios in Shanghai and Wuhan. The company was originally founded as an outsourcing firm but last year moved into full games development, targeting console game production.

"Gamestar will play an important role in our global growth plans, providing a high quality talent pool for our expanding product portfolio," said Graham Hopper, executive vice president and general manager of Disney Interactive Studios.

www.disneyinteractive.com

UK & AUSTRALIA

The UK and Australian games development trade associations have announced they are working together to further push their respective tax break lobbying.

Greg Bondar, CEO of the Game Developers Association of Australia, and Dr Richard Wilson, CEO of UK trade association Tiga, announced the move, saying they would be "working more closely together to ensure that their respective governments gave their game developer members a 'leg up' by way of tax breaks."

www.tiga.org

GLOBAL REPORTS

SCOTLAND: SCHOOL DAZE

Lucky Scottish children will be taught the basics of video game design, according to a new scheme – dubbed the 'Curriculum of Excellence' – that'll also teach children how to use software to create animations.

"There is huge confidence that Scotland will play an important part in the future of video games," said schools minister Maureen Watt.

www.scotland.gov.uk

UK: CODIES VICTORIOUS

Codemasters has been named best UK development team in sister magazine *MCV*'s 2008 Industry Excellence Awards, beating out competition from Criterion, Rebellion, Bizarre Creations and Sports Interactive. It was nominated for its work on *Colin McRae DiRT* and its new proprietary engine EGO.

The awards were voted for by senior figures of the publishing and retail industries.

www.codemasters.com

US: CAPCOMPANIES

Capcom's US vice president, Christian Svensson, has said that it's "sort of a given" that Capcom will acquire a Western studio in the next two years. "We're not going to acquire anyone that we haven't done a game with. Chemistry is so critical," he said.

www.capcom.com

SWEDEN: PARADOX

Swedish studio Paradox, the studio behind strategy games *Hearts of Iron* and *Europa Universalis II*, is to release its Europa engine for free via download portal GamersGate.

Independent developers will be able to use the engine to make games that can be sold via GamersGate with the same financial deal given to publishers who use the service.

www.paradoxplaza.com

US: RETRO DEPARTURES

Three key members of the *Metroid Prime* team have left Austin, Texas-based Retro Studios, Shacknews reported this month.

Design director Mark Pacini, art director Todd Keller, and principal technology engineer Jack Mathews were allegedly escorted off the premises of the studio, which is entirely owned by Nintendo. Rumours that the studio was to close have, however, proven false.

www.retrostudios.com

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Highlights of the past month
from www.developmag.com

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Codemasters swoops for Sega Racing Studio

Codemasters' Colin McRae (left) and Sega Racing Studio's Sega Rally (right) – so the two are a perfect match

We charted a curious time for UK developers in the Midlands last month.

Things began in early April, when we broke the news that Sega was planning to close its Racing Studio, which it had opened in 2005.

Sources informed *Develop* of the matter, which was later publicly confirmed by Sega.

"The decision is part of a review of Sega's Western Development Studios to ensure that each studio is a profitable entity in its own right, and unfortunately the Sega Racing Studio's five year plan would not result in a successful return for the Sega business moving forward," the company said in a statement.

"Sega would like to stress that there will be no changes within their other internal development studios."

Sega Racing Studio had released just one game in its lifecycle – a remake of *Sega Rally* – and was founded by former *Colin McRae* producer Guy Wilday, who moved to Sega from Codemasters. And speaking of which – it was Codemasters that then swooped in to buy the studio, offering over 40 of the Racing Studio staff new jobs as Codies employees.

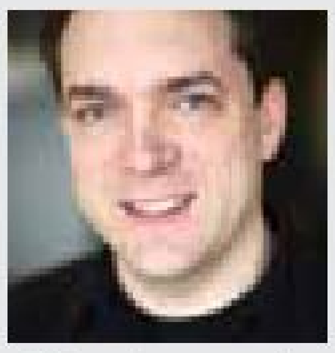
"In seizing this opportunity, we have created additional resources to escalate our plans in the racing segment," said Rod Cousens, CEO of Codemasters.

"We have enjoyed the full co-operation of our friends at Sega in making this happen. It is good business for Codemasters, an exciting prospect and there will be more to come as we are not content to stand still."

FEATURE HIGHLIGHTS

Q&A: Insomniac's Mike Acton
Following on from last month's news piece looking at the *Ratchet & Clank* studio's technology sharing initiative, we speak to engine director Mike Acton in a two-part Q&A discussing third-generation PS3 games, how education is lacking when it comes to teaching students about game design, and why the studio thinks studios need to start sharing technoloy.

Keeping up with Jones
Another in-depth two-part Q&A with Realtime Worlds' Dave Jones. We discuss the company's recently announced $50m investment and his plans for the studios' new MMO, *All Points Bulletin*, which boasts a raft of customisable content and innovative music features including a partnership with last.fm.



Steam Works
We also spoke to Jason Holtman, head of business development at Valve and in charge of the firm's digital distribution platform Steam. We discuss the services journey from launch to its current status as the ubiquitous download platform – and hear how he thinks the service has strengthened the PC games market.

www.developmag.com/interviews

COMMENTS

Re: Sega Racing Studio closed

"It's always a shame when a studio closes down, but given the location and the specialism they'll have no problem finding more work.

"Got to admit, though, that it looked to me like that studio would always live and die on its first title, given how much money Sega ploughed into it…"
Posted by mangacarta, on April 8th

"A great oppourtunity missed, really, and a shame that such talent and money was clearly wasted by an ill thought out venture. A packed racing genre needed a very special addition to compete with Dirt/Burnout etc."
Posted by sonicfan, on April 8th

Re: Acton: 'The education system hasn't kept up with the real world'

"This is totally true for 'computer games' courses, which should be ahead of the curve and predict the near future trends in the games industry and teach appropriately. However, Computer Science is a much broader topic, not aimed at a very specific industry. The only places low-level programming is really relevant anymore is games console tech programming and operating systems and driver coding.

"Another solution is for the platform providers to provide a better software platform on top of their complicated architectures. Their engineers understand the brain-bendingly complicated architecture: why make hundreds of other developers around the world try to understand it too?"
Posted by rikki, on April 22nd

#1

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THE SUNDAY TIMES 100 BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR 2008

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Develop conference looks at latest trends…

Lionhead's Peter Molyneux, Bizarre Creations' Sarah Chudley, Media Molecule's Alex Evans and representatives from the likes of Evolution, Rare, Jagex and Ninja Theory are just a handful of the latest names confirmed to be taking part as speakers at this year's Develop conference and expo.

The conference, which runs from July 29th to 31st at the Hilton Metropole Hotel in Brighton, promises to examine and dissect a variety of trends and issues across its coding, game design, business, production, art and world view tracks. Develop Mobile and education event Games:Edu take place on the first day, with the full conference and expo taking place on July 30th and 31st.

Although individual keynotes for each track in the main conference are still to be revealed, a number of must-attend sessions are already booked onto the schedule. These include:

- New Gameplay Dimensions in Role-playing Games Speaker: Peter Molyneux (Lionhead)
- Why we sold our studio – and why we didn't: A candid discussion about selling up or staying free (Business track). A *Develop*-chaired panel discussion with Sarah Chudley (Bizarre Creations), Paul Wedgwood (Splash Damage), Ian Baverstock (Kuju)
- Sticking Atmospheric Scattering Where the Sun don't Shine. Speaker: Damiano Iannetta, Rare
- Creatives and How to get the Best out of them. Speaker: Paul Barnett, Electronic Arts
- Snakes!: Implementing Python In Your Game Engine. Speaker: Doug Wolff, Eutechnyx

For those wishing to attend this year's conference, a number of different pass types are available, with early bird discounts available until July 1st. More information can be found here: **www.developconference.com**

…And hurry! Award lobbying deadline nears

The clock is ticking for those who want to lobby for a 2008 Develop Industry Excellence Award nomination, with the deadline just days away on May 15th.

Taking place on Wednesday, July 30th, the Develop Awards are the only peer-voted prizes which reward the creative and business successes of European games developers.

17 prizes are up for grabs this year, from Best New IP and Best Use of a Licence, through to Visual Arts, Audio Accomplishment, Business Development, Technical Innovation and the venerable Grand Prix prize.

To nominate your game, team or company – or someone else's – for an award, send a short written pitch to Michael.French@intentmedia.co.uk. And don't forget to give the reasons for your suggestion.

Last year, over 500 industry execs attended the popular event, which runs alongside the Develop conference and expo in Brighton, UK. Big winners included Realtime Worlds, Sony, Havok, Sega and Zoe Mode.

To book your place at the 2008 ceremony or find out about our sponsorship opportunities, email Jodie.Holdway@bhpr.co.uk or call her on +44 (0)1462 456780.
developmag.com/develop-awards

DEVELOP DIARY

YOUR COMPLETE GAMES DEVELOPMENT EVENT CALENDAR FOR THE MONTHS AHEAD…

Sony Computer Entertainment Europe proudly presents devstation.08

DEVSTATION 08

June 10th and 11th
London, UK
www.devstation.scee.com

DevStation 08 is a two-day conference dedicated to providing information on getting the most out of PlayStation 3. Presentations focus around the core technologies and features of PS3 and, for the first time, organiser SCEE is providing content for all disciplines (design, production, art, audio and programming), with focus on physics, SPU optimization and audio tricks through to the latest PlayStation Network developments.

MAY 2008

NORDIC GAME CONFERENCE
May 14th and 15th
Malmo, Sweden
www.nordicgame.com

JUNE 2008

DEVSTATION 08
June 10th and 11th
London, UK
www.devstation.scee.com

GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE
June 18th and 19th
Newcastle, UK
www.gamehorizon.net

PARIS GDC
June 23rd to 24th
Paris, France
www.parisgdc.com

JULY 2008

E3 SUMMIT 2008
July 15th to 17th
Los Angeles, USA
www.e3expo.com

DEVELOP CONFERENCE
July 29th to 31st
Brighton, UK
www.developconference.com

DEVELOP INDUSTRY EXCELLENCE AWARDS
July 30th
Brighton, UK
www.developmag.com/develop-awards

XNA GAMEFEST
July 22nd and 23rd
Seattle, USA
www.xnagamefest.com

CASUAL CONNECT AMERICA
July 23rd to 25th
Seattle, USA
seattle.casualconnect.org

AUGUST 2008

SIGGRAPH 2008
August 11th to 15th
Los Angeles, USA
www.siggraph.org

GCDC 2008
August 18th to 20th
Leipzig, Germany
www.gcdc.eu

GAMES CONVENTION
August 20th to 24th
Leipzig, Germany
www.gc-germany.com

SEPTEMBER 2008

AUSTIN GDC
September 15th to 18th
Texas, USA
www.gdconf.com

CHINA GDC 08
September 24th to 26th
Beijing, China
www.gdcchina.cn

NOVEMBER 2008

MONTREAL GAMES SUMMIT
November 6th and 7th
Montreal, Canada
www.sijm.ca/2008/

GAME CONNECTION
November 5th to 7th
Lyon, France
www.game-connection.com

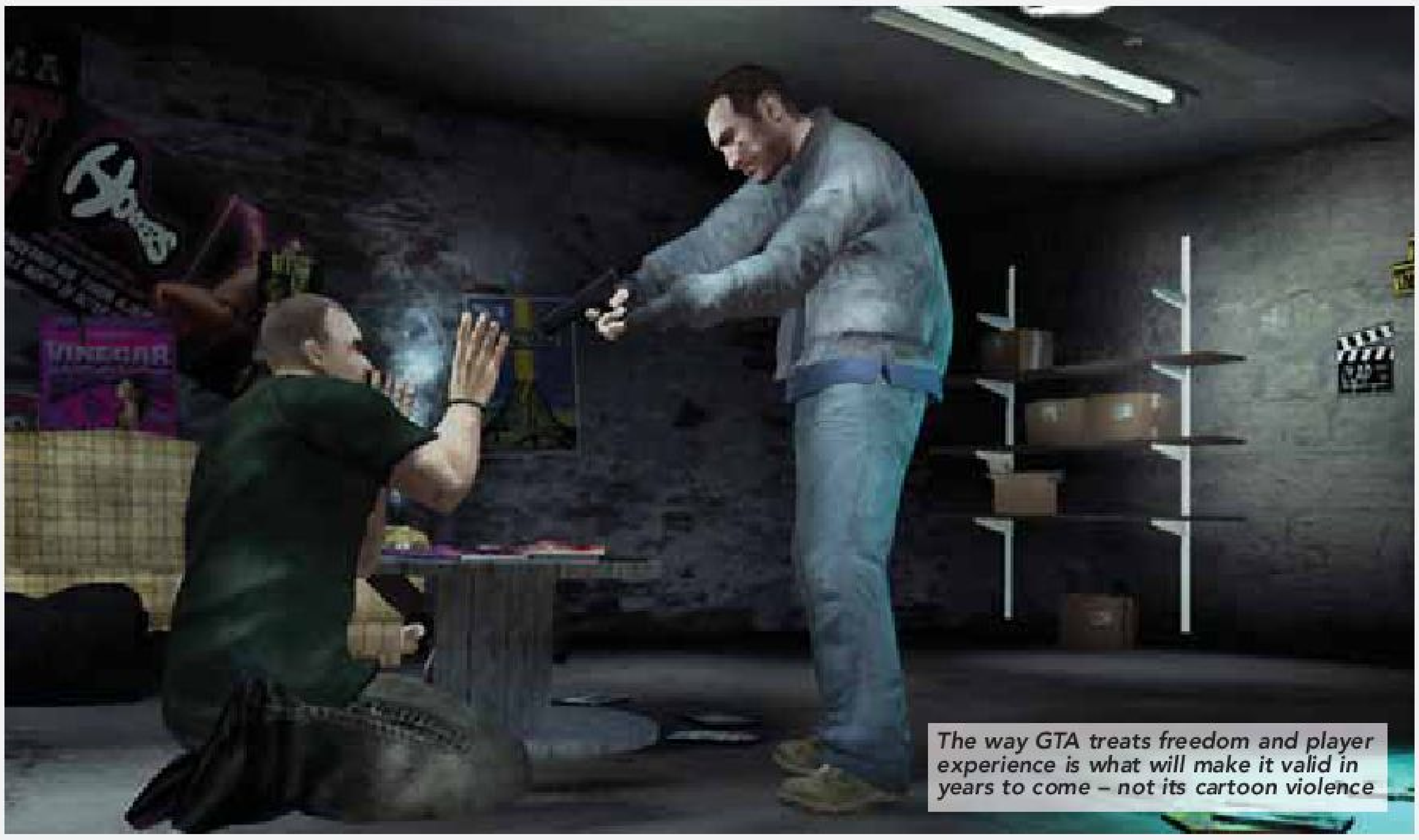
FEBRUARY 2009

GDC 09
March 23rd to 27th, 2009
San Francisco, USA
www.gdconf.com

VARIABLE DECLARATIONS

by Owain Bennallack

Censorship from a 2020 perspective



The way GTA treats freedom and player experience is what will make it valid in years to come – not its cartoon violence

One day – probably not too many years away – the currently infamous Byron Review will seem as applicable to gaming as 'Here be dragons!' scrawled on the edges of ancient maps, and the interactive entertainment of the future will find our agonising over age ratings laughable.

I'm not saying it's been an entirely pointless exercise to reconsider age ratings. Society, via its elected politicians, needs to engage with difficult subjects through reviews, trade bodies and quangos, rather like a vet studying haemorrhoids in hippos reaches first for the rubber gloves and a snorkel mask.

Who knows, post-Byron, people in positions of power might actually grasp that some games exist between the twin negative stereotypes of passive brain drainer and DIY murder manual. I won't suggest any older MPs have actually tried playing a game (they wouldn't stick their arm up an elephant, would they?), only that there seems to be a more measured attitude emerging.

WHAT ABOUT THE KIDS?

But the idea that the *Skins* generation will not play *Grand Theft Auto* because of a sticker is pure fantasy (especially the semi-feral, improperly parented ones we're in truth wringing our hands about).

This is the first generation in history where young males have seen everything you can do to a person being done to a person – at least outside of the royal compounds of particularly degraded ancient civilisations. With the Web still effectively a frontier land, a No Under-15s Allowed notice on a box seems about as realistic as the same message scrawled on a teenager's bedroom door.

Putting more logos on a box or 100 more games in front of a board might satisfy politicians and help conscientious mums, but it won't address the only substantive current problem: that some parents make no effort to engage with games on even a cursory level, and others aren't parenting at all. (One could even argue a logo absolves good parents from the chore of 'getting' games.)

GAMES WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Yet this is all tittle-tattle compared to the really hard – and more interesting – questions. Namely, how should we police adults playing games, as the games become more realistic and freeform? And should we police the games themselves, as MMOs have started doing?

Games are the first step in a medium we still barely understand, which is why worries about whether they affect the brain cannot be swept away by comparisons with movies or music.

Games don't get inside your head, your head gets inside a game. A game doesn't tell a story – you co-author an experience. And you can't play a game once and understand its scope – I might choose to run over pedestrians, where you just drove a taxi.

Games like *Elite* and *World of Warcraft* best reveal gaming's almost drug-like ability to create a temporary new reality. That's what makes games amazing, and dangerous. 'Evil game' poster child *Grand Theft Auto* is much more important for its free-roaming innovations than its cartoon murders. That freedom is what makes games amazing, and dangerous. In *Fable* you choose whether to be evil or good – in a way Jean Paul Satre would have approved of, through your actions rather than a menu, through murder or mercy. That's what makes games amazing, and dangerous.

> **"Putting more logos on a box might satisfy politicians, but not address that some parents make no effort to engage with games on even a cursory level..."**

That games were different didn't matter when we were jumping on mushrooms or jostling for *Pole Position*. But sooner or later you're going to be able to torture a photo-realistic adult, whether a designer put it in or because of some emergent behaviour arising from the physics, animation, and AI.

And what then?

If I get a kick out of virtual torture but pay my taxes and am nice to my neighbours, should I be allowed to? Society doesn't have consistent answers.

Objections relating to an actor's welfare hardly matter when it's a computer program being degraded. The issue seems more akin to laws about drugs and alcohol, where we judge personal deprivation to be a price paid by society as a whole, as well as those recurring fears about the long-term effect of 'negative' media on the mind – and of the monsters we might create.

Society has been grappling with LSD and nasty movies for 50 years; Moore's Law will run far faster than any investigations into the more complicated issue of virtual reality.

For three decades we've been safe enough behind crude game graphics to ignore such issues. But the curtain is falling. The most intense games of today will look like clumsy cave paintings by the mid-21st century. A future Dr. Tanya Byron may reflect her predecessor got off rather lightly.

Owain Bennallack is executive editor of *Develop*. He edited the magazine from its launch until its February 2006 issue. He has also worked at *MCV* and *Edge*, and has provided consultancy and evaluation services to several leading developers and publishers. He is also chairman of the *Develop* conference advisory board.

Autodesk

CREATE
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ANIMATE
Autodesk® MotionBuilder™ software enabled the assassin to fluidly jump from rooftops to cobblestone streets with ease.

INTEGRATE
Using Autodesk® HumanIK® middleware, Ubisoft grounded the assassin in his 12th century boots and his run-time environment.

HOW UBISOFT GAVE
AN ASSASSIN HIS SOUL.

autodesk.co.uk/Games

Image courtesy of Ubisoft

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MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

by Rick Gibson

Growing pains for global studios

Ubisoft's recent move to buy and rapidly expand a Gameloft studio in India to over 200 staff by 2009 is the latest example of international expansion into lower cost markets by bold companies unafraid to exploit globalisation. UK companies like Eutechnyx, SCi/Eidos and Babel have also adopted this strategy to maintain competitiveness. Ubisoft differs in that it intends to move some of these studios beyond in-sourcing lower value development towards entire game development. That critical step up the value chain is starting to create vibrant games development markets around the world.

Ubisoft is the pioneer of internationalisation, beginning its expansion in the mid-90s and now boasting studios in 18 territories worldwide, including Canada, Eastern Europe, Morocco and two sites in China. 80 per cent of its new hires derive from Canada, Romania and China, the largest site being in Montreal, where it plans a 3,000-strong studio within five years.

One of Ubisoft's oldest but most challenging ventures is its 500-strong Shanghai studio. Launched in 1996, it was planned as an internal art and animation resource. The company chose its location because of local government support, such as subsidised office space, and low salaries. Shanghai was China's newest broadcast and interactive hub, benefitting from a healthy flow of graduates from good local universities.

Ubisoft adopted a dual approach to staffing, bringing in Western specialists while recruiting graduates. A group of veterans acted as the new team's core and mentored raw recruits. Critically, it also needed local managers to oversee day-to-day operations. It headed the studio with senior Ubisoft staffers willing to spend several years in-country increasing capacity, capability and quality to service its internal clients. Early in its international expansion, Ubisoft was cautious about quality levels but aggressive on timing, investing in fairly high numbers of Western experts as a proportion of total Shanghai headcount with the goal of getting the studio up to speed rapidly.

Shanghai's graduates were recruited in volume by Ubisoft, whose studio quickly came to be seen as the best place for aspiring Chinese developers to gain hands-on experience, better than relocating to Japan or Korea to work on quality titles. The studio came to be known locally as 'Ubisoft U'.

Ubisoft knows all too well the perks and pitfalls of global expantion – although we don't know how much its Shanghai-developed Tom Clancy's EndWar has been inspired by them

Paris/France
Siege
Attacker: USA
Defender: Russia
RUSSIAN TROOPS NOW CONTROL PARIS
AMERICAN TROOPS NOW CONTROL THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

> ***"Ubisoft's plan to go from in-sourcing to full production will create vibrant development markets around the world..."***

The problem with being the graduate school for China's games industry was that the students wanted to graduate all too quickly. This combined with the rapid growth of the indigenous Chinese development sector and booming demand for experienced games developers led to a high rate of turnover of staff who left for better paid, more senior roles in new companies. The problem was essentially cultural, a deep-rooted lack of company loyalty primarily driven by the mentality of former state-owned enterprise employees who prioritised fast salary growth over commitment to the company training them. The result was a continuous flow of ex-Ubisoft producers, programmers, designers, marketing and sales people into local companies, whose rates as outsourced studios can today exceed San Francisco's. It is now hard to find Chinese games companies which are not run by ex-Ubisoft staff.

Despite the high costs and staff turnover, there have been undoubted benefits for Ubisoft's Shanghai studio. It offers cheaper development from a large, experienced team producing high quality art and animation in volume. It has developed successful ports of western-made games, including PS3/360 versions from the flagship *Ghost Recon* and *Splinter Cell* series. Crucially, the studio is now judged to have enough experience to be entrusted with developing its own games. That's a significant step for a global company with brands worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Ubisoft Shanghai is creating *Tom Clancy's EndWar*, a well-previewed real-time strategy game and potentially a major new series.

Arguably, the biggest benefit for Ubisoft has been that Shanghai has acted as a training ground for how to expand internationally. Ubisoft put this experience to work in multiple countries, especially Montreal, where it has invested in its own campus, which ties graduates into the company by subsidising training fees if hired students outlast their probationary periods. The ratio of foreign experts to local staff has also been reduced. In Montreal, 85 per cent of the staff are local. Its expertise and cultural proximity to major western games markets has seen Montreal produce some of the best selling games globally.

Ubisoft's new Chengdu studio was launched earlier this year with the aim of growing more slowly by working on 'in-sourced' projects in the short term but working towards MMO production in the long run. Ubisoft's belief in its overseas studios is testament to its growing confidence in emerging development markets' ability to handle new IP development.

How pivotal is this decision, and are these new studios really a viable and far cheaper alternative to Western studios? As we've written in the past, outsourced art or porting companies can get up and running fairly quickly but it takes much longer to incubate a viable creative talent pool originating global hit games. Ubisoft took over ten years to build enough confidence that Shanghai could create original designs, but other non-Western territories may not mature as slowly. Globalisation is slow but inexorable, and emerging territories' technical abilities are improving. The real test for China, India and others is whether they can overcome cultural barriers to create global hits, and there's no sign that this East/West cultural divide will be conquered soon.

Rick Gibson is a director at Games Investor Consulting, providing research, strategy consulting and corporate finance services to the to the games, media and finance industries
www.gamesinvestor.com

by The Alpenwolf

Tail-chasing is Not Design

The best games aren't those with evolutionary designs, but ones with more revolutionary concepts, like The Sims

Last week, I was seated comfortably overlooking the Mediterranean, well supplied with alcohol and having a look at GarageGames's intriguing InstantAction technology.

While I was very impressed with the services' ability to run console-style 3D games in an Internet browser, I wasn't quite as blown away by the games themselves. Not that they weren't fun, it's just that I knew they were fun because I'd played them before. For all that it makes a better dimensional transition than *Ms Pac-Man*, *Marble Madness* in 3D is still *Marble Madness*. And I was astonished to see a game that appeared to be a completely unexpected blend of *Asteroids* with *Intellivision Auto Racing*, of all things. Good fun, but not exactly new.

The curse of an encyclopedic knowledge of electronic gaming history is the ability to retroactively ascertain a game's conceptual pitch. "It's like *Grand Theft Auto*, but set in Tokyo!", "It's like *Doom*, but you can jump!", "It's like *World of Warcraft*, but with an amazing license!"

While these X-but-Y pitches are often a perfectly reasonable way to describe a game, and may even serve as an accurate means of estimating its eventual sales, they bear absolutely no relation to actual game design. Indeed, one can make a very serious argument that many games produced today are not so much designed as they take shape from an amorphous fog of mindless imitation, minor alteration, and a myopic focus on the bottom line.

Consider the automotive industry, for example. When an American car maker produces a car and decides to sell it painted red in France, this is not considered automotive design. Producing a right-hand drive model for the British market is also not considered design, nor is giving a model a different name for the Spanish market. And yet, in the game industry, that is about the amount of so-called design that many so-called game designers are presently doing. Think about how many imitations of *Grand Theft Auto* have been produced, with all various spins on the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Triads and whatever the organized crime gangs are called in Madagascar. The level of creativity exhibited is so low that no one has even gotten around to producing 'Big Steal Chariot', complete with dwarf hookers and magic elven hit men… and yet even this relatively radical facelift wouldn't amount to a genuinely new game design, it would be nothing more than a colorful paint job.

> ***"Producing a right-hand drive car for Britain is not considered design. But in the game industry that is about the amount of design so-called designers are doing…"***

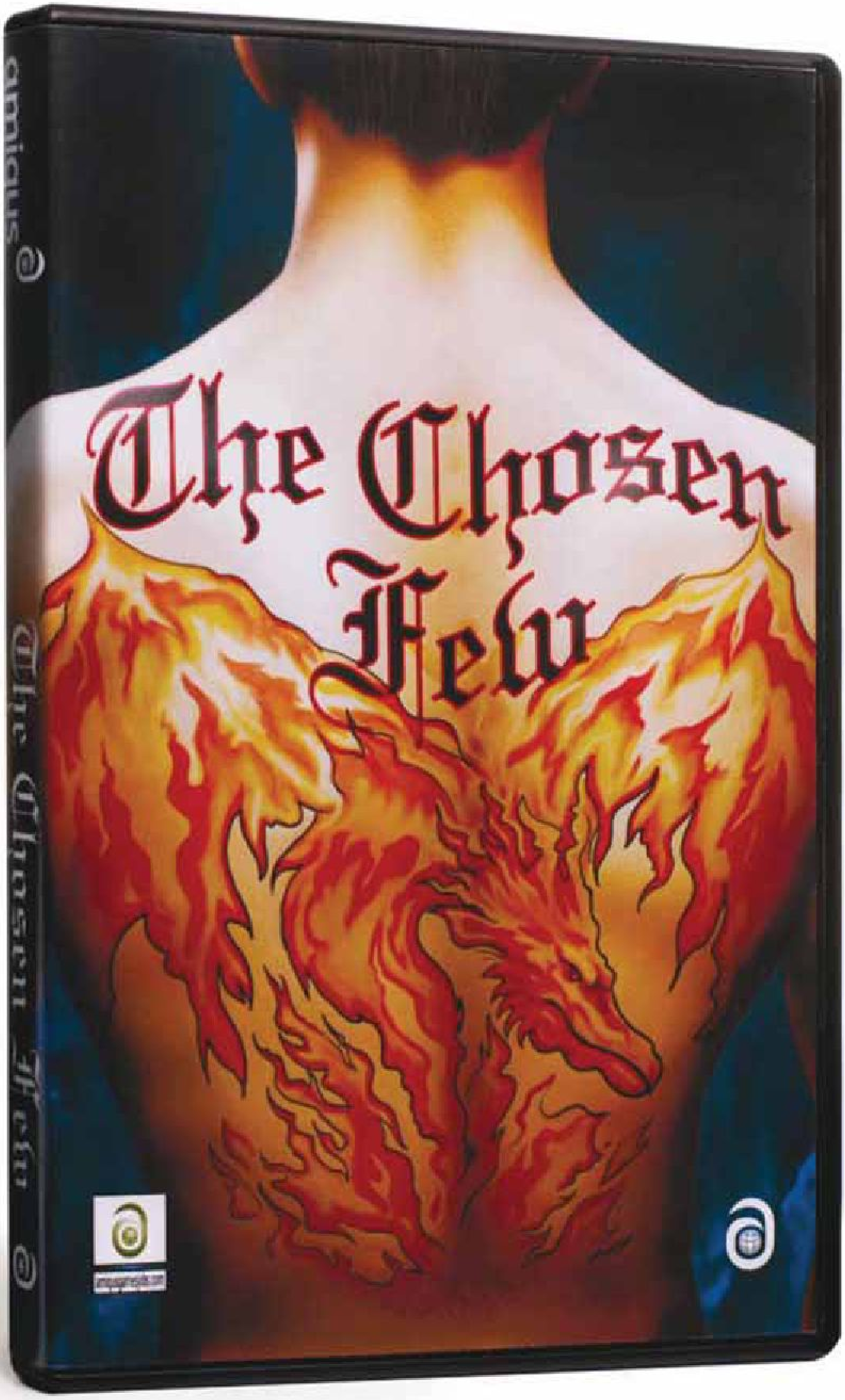
There are two ways to go about actually *designing* new games, the evolutionary approach and the revolutionary approach.

There isn't a hard and fast line here, as what at first appears to be completely revolutionary often betrays its evolutionary origins if one looks hard enough with an experienced eye, but for practical purposes the distinction is a useful one. The evolutionary approach involves making distinct improvements to existing modes of gameplay, while the revolutionary approach involves creating new modes of gameplay. Needless to say, it's a lot harder to do the latter than the former, but the revolutionary approach offers more personal, critical, and financial reward if you can manage to pull it off.

Actual game design is hard. It's always going to be a lot easier to throw an X-but-Y pitch together than design something truly new and different because doing so doesn't require any creative thinking. Not only that, but it's always going to be a lot easier to convince the financial individuals whose approval is required to sign off on an X-but-Y pitch because they wrongly perceive me-too products to be safer investments. While historically there has been a reliable market for generic imitations, the appearance of the MMO and web-based Flash games has drastically altered the market dynamic. Because *World of Warcraft* and *Diner Dash* can now easily add new content and be incrementally improved, there's not much incentive for an online gamer to bother moving to an imitation when the updated original may well offer more interesting new gameplay.

There is no easy solution to the challenge. The rising cost of development will continue to put pressure on designers to chase tails, but history has shown that this is ultimately a dead-end strategy for the entire industry. In the end, it will fall on the best designers of today and tomorrow to come up with new and better ways to play, and give everyone else some new tails to chase.

The Alpenwolf is a professional game designer who has been active in the industry for 17 years and designed games for some of the largest American and Japanese publishers. He has been known to visit Ironforge in the company of a large white wolf. design@alpenwolf.com



Many are called but few are chosen. It's a parable that applies to adverts for talented artists, managers, programmers, designers, producers and animators – people like you. And the better the job opportunity, the more competition you'll have. But the truth is that some of the industry's best positions are never even advertised. So we'd like to share a secret: you can become part of a select group of people who hear about opportunities no-one else will ever know about.

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SHERIDANS

Get the rights before getting creative with music

Developers who play loose with copyright law risk the destruction of their game warns **Tahir Basheer**…

Tahir Basheer *is a partner at the leading entertainment law firm, Sheridans.*

Music is at the forefront of games development as never before – and for all the right reasons, thanks to standout titles like *GTA*, *SingStar*, and, *Guitar Hero*. The latter is expected – within only two years from initial release – to be the first franchise to break through the US$1 billion barrier, ahead of such familiar games franchises as *FIFA*, *Madden*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *The Sims*.

So it's critical that developers understand fully the legal issues of sourcing and acquiring all music rights – of knowing what rights arise in commissioned or recorded music, who owns them, and how these can be cleared to enable the developer to exploit the game in all its forms, platforms and variations. The consequences of not doing so can be disastrous, if not criminal.

COPYRIGHT 101

Copyright law draws a clear distinction between the copyright in the original musical composition – what is generally termed the 'underlying work' – and its subsequent recording. The underlying work may contain both music and lyrics, and both elements are separately protected by copyright.

The first owner of each of these copyrights is their respective author(s), but you should note that the lyrics and the music might have been written by different people, or by more than one person. In other words, a number of people may have composed the song in its recorded form, which, if used in a game, will mean each of these individuals' consents will be required. A fresh copyright arises when the composition is subsequently recorded, this time in the sound recording itself. Again, typically, the first owner of this copyright will not be the composer(s) of the underlying work but the party who makes the arrangements for the recording to take place, usually a third-party record company.

You must obtain the consents of all these parties, and not just for the inclusion of the music in the game. The consents given should be sufficiently wide to enable you to exploit the game as extensively as possible.

WHEN COPYRIGHT GOES WRONG

Not obtaining proper consent from copyright owners can be an expensive mistake to make. Unauthorised use in a game of a composition or a recording of a composition is an infringement of copyright law. An aggrieved copyright owner might initiate an action against you, which, if successful, can lead to a claim for substantial damages or a share of the game's profits. Worse, the rights' holder may obtain an injunction preventing exploitation of the game altogether, and the destruction or delivery up of all existing copies. The unauthorised use of music in a title could even give rise to criminal proceedings against a game's developer.

It is clearly sensible then for a games developer or publisher to obtain (or at least begin the process of obtaining) all necessary rights before substantial work is done on the game and, in particular, before a piece of music becomes essential to gameplay.

Be clear what rights are required, and whether the music will need to be adapted for use. Future proof the rights where possible, and think about ancillary rights, too.

These costs may seem prohibitive given all the competing demands on the budget of a top-flight modern game, but if your title is a hit and you want to reuse the soundtrack in other versions, it could be more cost effective to obtain the rights now, than to try and bargain for them later with a money-spinner on your hands.

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Why casualgam

Intent Media's first games launch in eight years is here to serve one of the most criminally under-represented sectors in the modern industry. If you develop, sell, publish or host casual games, this is the site you'll need to read, day-in, day-out…

ARE YOU A developer tasked with making your studio's new casual games strategy a success?

Or perhaps you're a retailer who – outside the convincing waffle of the exec meeting room – doesn't have a clue what really differentiates slow-selling value stodge from the next *Cooking Mama*?

CasualGaming.biz has the answers you need.

> ***"Are you tasked with making your studio's new casual games strategy a success?"***

As the casual gaming industry casts its net ever wider, press attention – from the largest national newspaper to the tiniest games site – is still largely ignoring this burgeoning market.

There is no single outlet for casual games developers, publishers, retailers, portals and platform holders to discover the latest news and significant trends in the sector; and nowhere for the business's creative minds to share their thoughts and opinion.

At *CasualGaming.biz*, our crack team of experienced games industry journalists are here to right that wrong. Not only do we offer a wealth of the latest stories affecting the sector, but user-generated content participation is at a premium – not least through our prominent blog section.

On this page, we explore some of the most important areas of a site we're very proud to launch.

However, the only way to truly see just how important a tool this could become for your business is to log on today…

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WWW.CASUALGAMING.BIZ

HOME

To keep things 'casual', the site's homepage handily presents all of the latest news, interviews and features in the casual games market in one place. You'll also find the latest jobs, opinion 'blog' pieces and more to keep you abreast of the latest happenings in the sector. And for those working in a specific area of casual games, our news category tabs – online, retail, PC, console, mobile and TV – will sort the most relevant recent news just for you.

NEWS

As you've all already discovered on *Developmag.com*, this is your one stop shop for all the news of the day. Not only will you find a news feed from every relevant industry and casual games consumer site, but you'll be able to take a look at the most popular stories around. Of course, you'll be able to find the latest headlines from *CasualGaming.biz* sister publications *Develop*, *MCV*, and *Mobile Entertainment*, but you can also see stories from the likes of *PocketGamer*, *Casualicious* and *GameZebo*.

BLOG

As with any fledgling, successful business, the casual games market is full of people who have a lot to get off their chest – on both sides of the Atlantic. So the *CasualGaming.biz* blog page gives these individuals access to air their views to their peers – and receive pearls of wisdom from the forefathers of the industry. You can also expect the site's editorial team to let rip every now and again, too.

18,000 EMAIL DATABASE INCLUDES COVERS ALL KEY CASUAL GAMES SECTORS IN THE UK AND EUROPEAN MARKET

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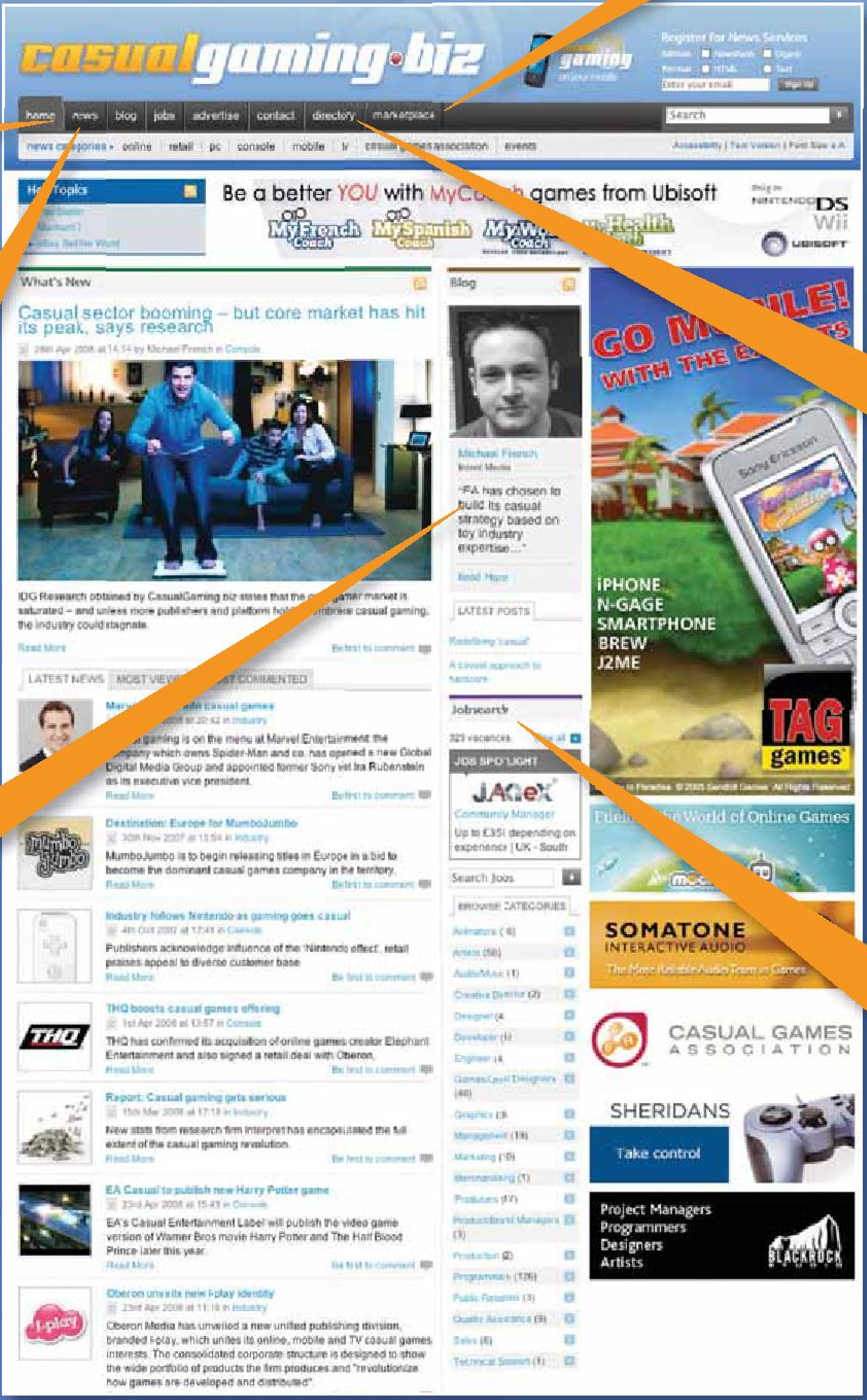
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BREW
J2ME
TAG games
World of Online Games
SOMATONE INTERACTIVE AUDIO
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Casual sector booming – but core market has hit its peak, says research

28th Apr 2008 at 14:34 by Michael French in Console

IDG Research obtained by CasualGaming.biz states that the core gamer market is saturated – and unless more publishers and platform holders embrace casual gaming, the industry could stagnate.

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gaming is on the menu at Marvel Entertainment the company which owns Spider-Man and co. has opened a new Global Digital Media Group and appointed former Sony vet Ira Rubenstein as its executive vice president.

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Destination: Europe for MumboJumbo

MumboJumbo is to begin releasing titles in Europe in a bid to become the dominant casual games company in the territory.

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Industry follows Nintendo as gaming goes casual

Publishers acknowledge influence of the 'Nintendo effect', retail praises appeal to diverse customer base

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THQ boosts casual games offering

THQ has confirmed its acquisition of online games creator Elephant Entertainment and also signed a retail deal with Oberon.

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New stats from research firm Interpret has encapsulated the full extent of the casual gaming revolution

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EA Casual to publish new Harry Potter game

EA's Casual Entertainment Label will publish the video game version of Warner Bros movie Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince later this year.

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Oberon unveils new I-play identity

Oberon Media has unveiled a new unified publishing division, branded I-play, which unites its online, mobile and TV casual games interests. The consolidated corporate structure is designed to show the wide portfolio of products the firm produces and "revolutionize how games are developed and distributed".

Michael French
Intent Media

"EA has chosen to build its casual strategy based on toy industry expertise…"

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MARKETPLACE

CasualGapming.biz's Marketplace section lets you go one better than just letting you advertise your game: your target audience actually play it. If you're a developer looking to get your title on the leading online software distributors or a casual games portal looking for a publisher to take your game into retail, this provides the perfect showcase for your product.

DIRECTORY

Don't know a MumboJumbo from a Midway? Your Pogo from your PopCap? Here you'll find a comprehensive list of all of the companies that make up the global casual games network – from the tiniest bedroom developer to the largest publishing behemoth. With featured companies and a huge company spotlight, there's no longer an excuse for not knowing who makes the casual games business what it is.

JOBS

All of the latest jobs in development and publishing, pooled from our vast database via *MCV*, *Develop* and *CasualGaming.biz* itself – giving even better value to those who want to advertise jobs on an Intent Media games site.

GREATBRITISHGAMES

RuneScape

Nick Gibson looks at the making of a highly-commercial but under-exposed British super-hit…

RUNESCAPE

ESTIMATED USAGE AND SALES:
120m accounts registered to date, including 8.5m active accounts/month (5m every fortnight) and around 1m premium subscriptions (paying roughly £3.20/$5 a month)

NUMBER OF ITERATIONS:
Two major versions (launched 2001, 2004)

TIMELINE:

2001: *RuneScape* open beta launched in January, reaching 1m active players by the end of the year

2002: *RuneScape* subscription service launched

2003/4: *RuneScape 2* launched as a more advanced alternative to the original RuneScape which is renamed *RuneScape Classic*

2005: Paying subscribers reach 500,000

2006: Paying subscribers reach 850,000

2007: Paying subscribers exceed 1m, German version launched

2008: *RuneScape* reaches 120m total account registrations. Jagex launches casual games portal FunOrb

OWNERSHIP HISTORY

2001: Earliest public version of RuneScape launched. Jagex founded at the end of the year by Andrew Gower, Paul Gower and Constant Tedder to take over the operation of the game which had experienced explosive growth

2005: Jagex secures unknown quantity of investment from VC firm Insight Venture Partners

2007: Jagex co-founder and CEO Constant Tedder leaves the company and is replaced by former PayPal Europe CEO, Geoff Iddison

The story of RuneScape's inception appears highly anachronistic, one more often heard about the UK games industry in the 1980s than in 2001.

The original version of the game was created by Andrew Gower (with the help of his brother and Jagex co-founder, Paul) whilst he was an undergraduate at Cambridge University. It was written in Java, usually considered unsuitable for hardcore games because of its performance constraints and inefficiency. The game was even launched from and initially hosted at Andrew Gower's house, such were the budget constraints the original team were operating under.

RuneScape is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game set in the fantasy world of Gielinor. As is typical of MMO fare, players create and nurture characters which are taken on quests and adventures and can opt to undertake these quests alone or in conjunction with other players or enter PvP zones. Soon after launch, it soon became clear that the key to RuneScape's appeal is the community-based gameplay. In fact, it appears that a significant proportion of many players' game time is spent socialising rather than questing and levelling.

Unlike the vast majority of MMORPGs, RuneScape is played in a Java-capable web browser and therefore playable on almost any computer with an internet connection. It was designed from the outset to be a game with appeal in all demographic categories and its low technological barrier to entry is deliberate. Because of this low common denominator, the game is simplistic-looking. The *RuneScape* web site, the central hub from which all new games are launched, looks equally low-tech, despite the vastness of its user base and revenue currently being created. The original game was rendered in a highly simplistic form of 3D viewed from an isometric perspective. A higher quality 3D renderer was launched as part of *RuneScape 2*, an overhaul of the game engine launched in 2003 which also addressed numerous security issues deriving from the simpler original version. The gameplay and game engine has been maintained since then although it still looks fairly simplistic compared to most hardcore RPGs and MMOs.

Like all MMOs, *RuneScape* is more of a service than a product. The retention and expansion of *RuneScape*'s paying user base is heavily dependent on Jagex's ability to maintain the game's ongoing appeal. *RuneScape*'s content needs to be updated on a regular basis to keep the experience fresh for longer-term players and the game world needs to be carefully monitored to prevent cheating, hacking and any other activities that imbalance the gameplay. This necessitates a sizeable development team permanently at work maintaining and evolving the game as well as a large, dedicated customer support resource handling players' technical, gameplay and billing enquiries. The need to provide adequate support for MMOs and to keep the gameplay evenly balanced is both exacting and extremely complex. The failure to do so has proven the undoing of numerous other MMOs in the past.

In between the end of 2007 and the start of 2008, Jagex implemented some major changes to *RuneScape*'s gameplay primarily aimed at curtailing the trade in *RuneScape* (virtual) assets outside of the game world. The changes resulted in 60,000 infringing accounts being closed by Jagex and a wave of user criticism, although growth is understood to have resumed since.

COMPANY INCEPTION AND GROWTH

Jagex was incorporated in late 2001 by Andrew and Paul Gower and Constant Tedder after it had become apparent that the *RuneScape* project, begun at Cambridge University, had accumulated a million (non-paying) registrants in less than 12 months and could no longer be operated out of the Gower house as an amateur concern.

With hosting costs mounting as well as the growing need for constant maintenance and improvement of the RuneScape game world, Jagex began to seek ways of monetising the vast, rapidly growing traffic the game was generating. Advertising was an obvious and easily implemented first step. This was followed by the more important development of an optional premium subscription version of RuneScape that for between £2.50-£4 per month (depending on payment method and subscription duration) gave players access to exclusive game areas, features, content updates and support. The free play version was retained and remains a crucial draw for new players to whom subscriptions can later be up-sold. Critically, RuneScape's subscription price was, and continues to be, a fraction of that charged by most other MMORPG providers and, partly as a result, *RuneScape* remains second only to *World of Warcraft* in terms of premium subscriber numbers in the West.

With some 150 servers located in eight countries servicing around a million paying subscribers, and some 7.5m non-paying active players per month, Jagex has become a major player in the Western online games market (a market that remains, due to cultural reasons, largely segregated from the even larger Asian online games market). Some 55 per cent of its user base is said to be based in North America with the majority of the rest in the UK and other parts of Europe. Although Jagex has *RuneScape* servers in Holland, Sweden and Finland, the game remains almost entirely English-language based. However, Jagex launched a localised German language version of *RuneScape* in 2007 and is working on a French language version.

Part of Jagex's success can be attributed to a carefully controlled affiliate marketing scheme which sees *RuneScape* promoted on a limited number of high-traffic third party sites. The most important of these has been UK-based miniclip.com, one of the largest casual games portals and community sites on the internet (receiving in excess of 30m unique visitors per month and featuring a high degree of demographic cross-over with *RuneScape*).

In 2005, Jagex announced that it had sold 35 per cent of the company to Insight Venture Partners, a US Venture Capital firm, for an undisclosed sum. The purpose of the investment was stated as being to allow the company to ensure its "explosive" level of growth was properly supported and help take the company into more international markets. Since then, the company has expanded rapidly, growing its headcount to around 380. *RuneScape*'s average revenue per paying subscriber, at $5 to $6 per month, suggests annualised sales of some $60m to $66m. In its last available accounts (2006) Jagex reported a pre-tax profit margin of some 61 per cent (£10.2m) making it one of the most profitable independent games companies in the UK.

> **"Its last available accounts suggest Runescape has helped make Jagex one of the most profitable independent games companies in the UK…"**

As an online games business, Jagex's business model is very dissimilar to traditional computer and video games developers. Its principal business partners are not games publishers but hosting and bandwidth companies, payment service providers, advertisers and distribution companies. Jagex operates with the sort of creative and commercial autonomy that most other developers could only dream of. It remains one of the quietest and least publicised developers in the UK (a stance taken deliberately by its management team). In addition to being one of the most profitable, Jagex is also the UK's largest independent developer by staff level, and one of the biggest employers. Its commercial model should make it a poster boy for the disintermediation of publishers and the 'direct to consumer' distribution channel in which so many developers place their hopes.

ANALYSIS

At a time when the concept of 'bedroom' hit games development was thought to have long since passed into history, *RuneScape* arrived to shatter this misconception and turn Jagex, its creators, into the largest indigenous independent games developer in the UK. Of course, much of Jagex's financial success can be attributed to the fact that most online games such as *RuneScape* tend to be published by the companies that developed them and thus, unlike traditional games developers who derive a percentage of a third party's net percentage of sale proceeds, Jagex books 100 per cent of the sale proceeds itself. As a result, *RuneScape* should be counted as one of the most valuable IPs to have originated from the UK whilst having its sales, profits and ownership retained by a UK company.

RuneScape's mass-market appeal lies in its simplicity and accessibility (both financial and technical). It has tapped into the vast market of games players unwilling or unable to spend premium prices on PCs capable of playing the latest, expensive, processor-intensive games. Its core gameplay concepts are very similar to its retail-distributed RPG and MMORPG analogues. The (re-)popularisation of fantasy milieus by *The Lord of the Rings* films has undoubtedly helped games such as *RuneScape* and *World of Warcraft* by making such universes acceptable to teen and even pre-teen players. These age groups are responsible for a global explosion in the popularity of avatar-based online community games and services in which communication and social interaction are key. *RuneScape* has been able to tap into this trend by appealing, in particular, to 13 to 18 year-olds (who comprise at least 60 per cent of *RuneScape*'s users).

CONCLUSIONS

- The game maximises its addressable market by being web browser based and thus capable of being run on most computers
- The free-play mode, relatively low (and entirely optional) premium subscription price and multitude of payment mechanisms is attractive to younger and less affluent players
- Strong community features encourage broad and open socialisation between players
- The game exhibited a strong growth momentum that, to a degree, is self-sustaining as the addition of more players increases the socialisation opportunities and enhances some aspects of the gameplay
- Strong role-playing gameplay features (e.g. character building, virtual asset accumulation) encourages loyalty and reduces churn
- The affiliate deal with miniclip.com allowed RuneScape to tap into one of the largest casual games communities on the internet

Games Investor Consulting is a specialist games industry consultancy founded in 2003 to provide independent games research and corporate finance consulting to the games industry and financial community. Headed by Rick Gibson and Nick Gibson, GIC is one of the industry's most trusted sources for market intelligence, has generated a number of industry-standard reports, and has consulted on games strategy and research for numerous games and media companies as well as trade and governmental bodies.

Some people stop at the edge

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Others live on it

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Lead GUI Artist | Production Managers | Project Outsource Co-ordinator
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THE DEALS

BLUE OCEAN GAMING

Croatian casual games studio Ocean Media has become an approved DS developer in response to continuing enquiries from potential partners regarding DS development. It plans to port its advanced Xtrema Physics 2D technology to the format and 'prototype several innovative games'.
www.oceanmedia.hr

GAMEBRYO'S SADNESS

Nibris has revealed that its monochrome Wii horror game, *Sadness*, is being developed with Emergent's Gamebryo engine.

"We will have quite a few graphical effects in our game which some believe are impossible to attain on the Wii. Gamebryo helped make it possible. We are firmly convinced we made the right choice," said project manager Tomasz Wisniowski.
www.nibris.net

AMBX-RATED DARES

amBX has signed up as a sponsor for this year's Dare to be Digital competition, with student teams provided with amBX development kits should they wish to implement the ambient technology in their games. Philips will also provide amBX equipment for the Dare ProtoPlay events, so that the games can be experienced in their intended state.
www.ambx.com

DC LOOKING FOR EPICS

Comic house DC Comics has signed a deal to make a comic book based on Epic's *Gears of War* series for its WildStorm imprint.

"Epic sets the bar very high, in graphics, story, and gameplay – and expect no less from our series, starting with our lead-in arc that fills in the gaps between the first game and the upcoming sequel," said Hank Kanalz, VP general manager at WildStorm.
www.dccomics.com

TIMEGATE TEACHES ABC

TimeGate Studios has forced ABC to rename its upcoming TV show *Section 8*, because it's been developing a game of the same name since 2005. The studio filed a dispute in March, but now ABC has settled and announced that it will not be using the name. TimeGate's *Section 8* is planned for release this year.
www.timegate.com

DEVELOPER CHART

MAY 2008

1

↑

LAST MONTH **8**

UBISOFT (MONTREAL)

BEST SELLING GAME:
TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS 2

Possibly the most convoluted number-based game title since the camp classic *Final Fantasy X-2*, Ubisoft Montreal's latest exploitation of the Tom Clancy name seems to have gone down well with the public, helping the studio jump seven positions.

XB360/PS3

2

→←

LAST MONTH **2**

SEGA

BEST SELLING GAME:
MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

A new DS version of *Mario & Sonic* has helped the game maintain Sega's choke-hold over our charts, beating Nintendo for the first time in ages (or possibly ever). Also this month: Hell now "quite chilly," apparently.

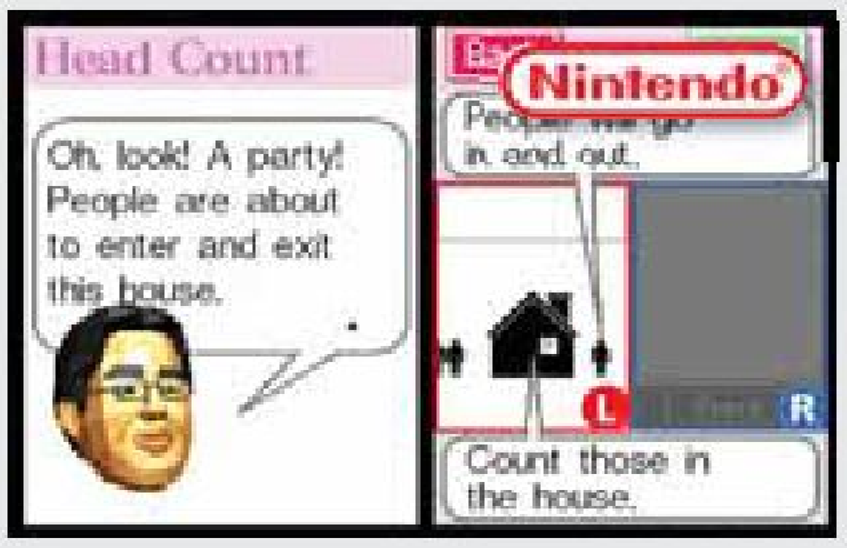
WII, DS

3

↓

LAST MONTH **1**

NINTENDO


Head Count
Oh, look! A party! People are about to enter and exit this house.
Nintendo
People will go in and out.
L
R
Count those in the house.

BEST SELLING GAME:
DR KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING

Another month, another paragraph about *Brain Training*. The only light at the end of our never-ending tunnel is that next month, hopefully, *Wii Fit* will be Nintendo's most popular title, and we can make some tasteless jokes about fat people.

DS

4

↑

LAST MONTH **120**

EA MONTREAL

BEST SELLING GAME:
ARMY OF TWO

When John Riccitiello tries to sleep at night, pondering whether or not he's done the right thing, last Christmas' smash hit *skate*. and *Army of Two* should go to prove that his focus on new IP is one that the general public seems to approve of.

XB360, PS3

5

↑

LAST MONTH **6**

EA CANADA

BEST SELLING GAME:
FIFA 08

England may be out of Euro 2008 (or so *Develop*'s co-workers lament), but our national team's lack of talent is EA's gain as hours of televised football give way to hours of fantasy knockabouts. Which sounds a lot like a footballer's typical extra-curricular activities, now we come to think of it.

PS2, PS3, PSP, XB360, WII, PC

OUR MONTHLY RANKING OF THE WORLD'S STUDIOS BASED ON UK GAMES SALES

CHART KEY	
NEW NEW ENTRY	↑ UP
▨ INDEPENDENT	↓ DOWN
	↔ NO MOVE

6	↓	LAST MONTH 5	INFINITY WARD	Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare	XB360, PS3, PC	🇺🇸
7	↑	LAST MONTH 13	KONAMI	Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	PS2, PS3, XB360, DS, PC, Wii	🇯🇵
8	↑	LAST MONTH 9	MAXIS	The Sims 2: Freetime	PC	🇺🇸
9	NEW	LAST MONTH -	POLYPHONY DIGITAL	Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	PS3	🇯🇵
10	NEW	LAST MONTH -	ROCKSTAR NEW ENGLAND	Bully: Scholarship Edition	XB360, Wii	🇺🇸
11	NEW	LAST MONTH -	KAOS STUDIOS	Frontlines: Fuel Of War	XB360, PC	🇺🇸
12	↓	LAST MONTH 3	CAPCOM	Devil May Cry 4	XB360/PS3	🇯🇵
13	NEW	LAST MONTH -	MISTWALKER / FEELPLUS	Lost Odyssey	XB360	🇯🇵
14	↑	LAST MONTH 22	MIDWAY	Game Party	Wii	🇺🇸
15	↓	LAST MONTH 4	CRITERION GAMES	Burnout Paradise	XB360/PS3	🇬🇧
16	↑	LAST MONTH 27	NEVERSOFT	Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock	XB360/PS3/Wii	🇺🇸
17	↓	LAST MONTH 16	SONIC TEAM	Sonic And The Secret Rings	Wii	🇯🇵
18	↑	LAST MONTH 44	COOKING MAMA LIMITED	Cooking Mama 2	DS	🇯🇵
19	↓	LAST MONTH 11	EA BLACK BOX	Need For Speed: Prostreet	XB360/PS3/PS2/PSP/PC/Wii	🇨🇦
20	↓	LAST MONTH 10	TRAVELLER'S TALES	Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga	XB360/PS3/Wii/DS	🇬🇧

Chart Comment

While Nintendo may have reigned for almost all of 2007, their top spot on our chart has finally fallen to another studio – Ubisoft Montreal which, buoyed by the success of *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Vegas 2*, has shot seven places up the chart.

Nintendo instead drops to third place, with *Brain Training* still it's most popular title on the shelves, pipped to second place by Sega, *Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games* getting a second lease of life now that the DS version has been tardily released.

The irony that Sega has beaten Nintendo with a game based on Nintendo's IP and released solely on Nintendo's platforms doesn't need to be pointed out – although come to think of it, that's exactly what I've just done.

> *"The real trend this month is new entries, with four studios joining the chart..."*

But the real trend this month is new entries, with four studios joining the chart for the first time in a while. Polyphony leads the pack in ninth place riding on *Gran Turismo 5 Prologue*'s coat-tails, and *Bully: Scholarship Edition* helps Rockstar New England into tenth place. Kaos follows in at 11th, while the Mistwalker and Feelplus tag-team brings up the rear at 14th thanks to the remarkable *Lost Odyssey*.

Ed Fear
ed.fear@intentmedia.co.uk

CHART DATA EXCLUSIVELY SUPPLIED BY

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AAA External Producer
£Excellent+ Bonus + Bens

South-East CW003EP

My client is a leading international publisher who have both a track record and a pipeline of genuine AAA product. They are highly respected within the industry, and are looking to recruit the best of the best! You will be a key part of a small external team, and should have experience as producer on a high-profile next-gen title. More details on this great role and full spec available on request.

Contact: colin@aswift.com

External Associate Producer
to £35k + Bonus + Bens

South-East CW003AP

Fantastic opportunity for a Producer or experienced Associate to join a great team within a stable top-tier publisher. You will be working on high-profile titles from day one, and should have the experience, ability and confidence to hit the ground running. This is a great opportunity for long-term career progression and development within an industry leader, full spec available on request.

Contact: colin@aswift.com

Quality Assurance Manager
To £45k + bonuses + benefits

Cambridge DJ1244QA

Our client is a significant operator in all the major gaming markets worldwide, developing and commercialising highly compelling character games that appeal to a wide audience. Their key product is the 3rd most popular online games in the world! They are currently looking for an experienced QA Manager to run their expanding QA Team. More details of this great role and full spec available on request.

Contact: danny@aswift.com

French/German Localisation Project Managers
£Excellent + bonuses + benefits

Cambridgeshire DJ1245PM

My client is one of the world's leading providers of localisation solutions to the interactive entertainment industry. They have many years of high-level industry experience and deal with some of the industry's finest products.They are currently looking to employ both a French and German industry experienced Project Manager. The successful candidate must have translation experience as well as good software application.

Contact: danny@aswift.com

Lead Programmer
€Excellent + Relocation + Benefits

Finland PA2406F1

Our client is looking for a talented Lead Programmer for a content driven media platform project. The project is a one of a kind production never before seen in Finland and is a unique opportunity. You will plan the technical design of the project with the Programming Manager and act as the leading technical expert in the production. More details available on application.

Contact: pete@aswift.com

Lead Developer - Mobile Phone Games
£40k - £45k + Benefits

South East PA3436F3

Leading Developer / Publisher of mobile phone titles. Would suit either an experienced mobile developer or console programmer looking for more control and creativity over projects. Shorter development timescales and smaller teams offer the chance to work on a greater variety of projects and be a major influence on the finished product.

Contact: pete@aswift.com

Experienced Programmers
£DOE + benefits

Midlands PA342F1

Very high profile developer currently working on 3 major titles. They are a FPS specialist employing over 200 people and are still expanding. We especially want to hear from people with one or more of the following skills:- Graphics, AI, Networking, Physics, Tools. This is a chance to work with a very bright and passionate development team.

Contact: pete@aswift.com

DS Programmer
£30k - £35k DOE

London PA3435F

Our Client is an energetic and rapidly expanding video games Developer/publisher. They are currently seeking an experienced DS programmer to join their small and friendly development team. Chance to work in an informal environment with an experienced, motivated team. You will be able to work across a variety of projects in terms of format, genre & look.

Contact: pete@aswift.com

Senior Artists
£Excellent + Bonuses

London SH3470SA

My client is a independent studio working on a ground-breaking next-gen title. They are looking to recruit two exceptionally talented Senior Artists who have the ability and passion to produce high quality, extraordinary environmental art-work using 3DS Max. Full spec available on request.

Contact: simon@aswift.com

Game/Level Designers
£Excellent + Benefits

Midlands SH014D

My client is looking to recruit a handful of industry experienced Game and Level Designers to join their team developing the latest edition of a worldwide 'AAA' franchise. Vacancies are across all levels, including Senior and Leads, so if you want to be part of a Triple A team, don't hesitate to apply!

Contact: simon@aswift.com

Interface Artists
£DOE + Benefits

Multiple Locations SH733IA

Candidates must be able to communicate and realise ideas and concepts from early drafts through to final 'triple A' systems using a variety of software. A thorough understanding of Photoshop CS, Illustrator, Adobe After effects and a software package such as 3D Studio Max, would be a strong asset. More details available on request.

Contact: simon@aswift.com

Animator
£Neg DOE

North-West KM2382A

My client is currently looking to recruit a number of experienced Maya animators for their next round of big-license projects. The successful candidate will be able to portray convincing motion of a wide variety of subjects, as well as having the ability to rig and skin characters. Please contact for more details.

Contact: katie@aswift.com

Web www.aswift.com Tel 01709 876877

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BETA

DEVELOPMENT FEATURES, INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS & MORE

"This is not hardcore…"
Caspar Field, Relentless, p43

The Develop Roundtable: GameHorizon
p38

The rise of Dare to be Digital
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Advice from the frontline of recruitment
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Development goes punk

How EA Bright Light fought against the establishment for new game Zubo, p32

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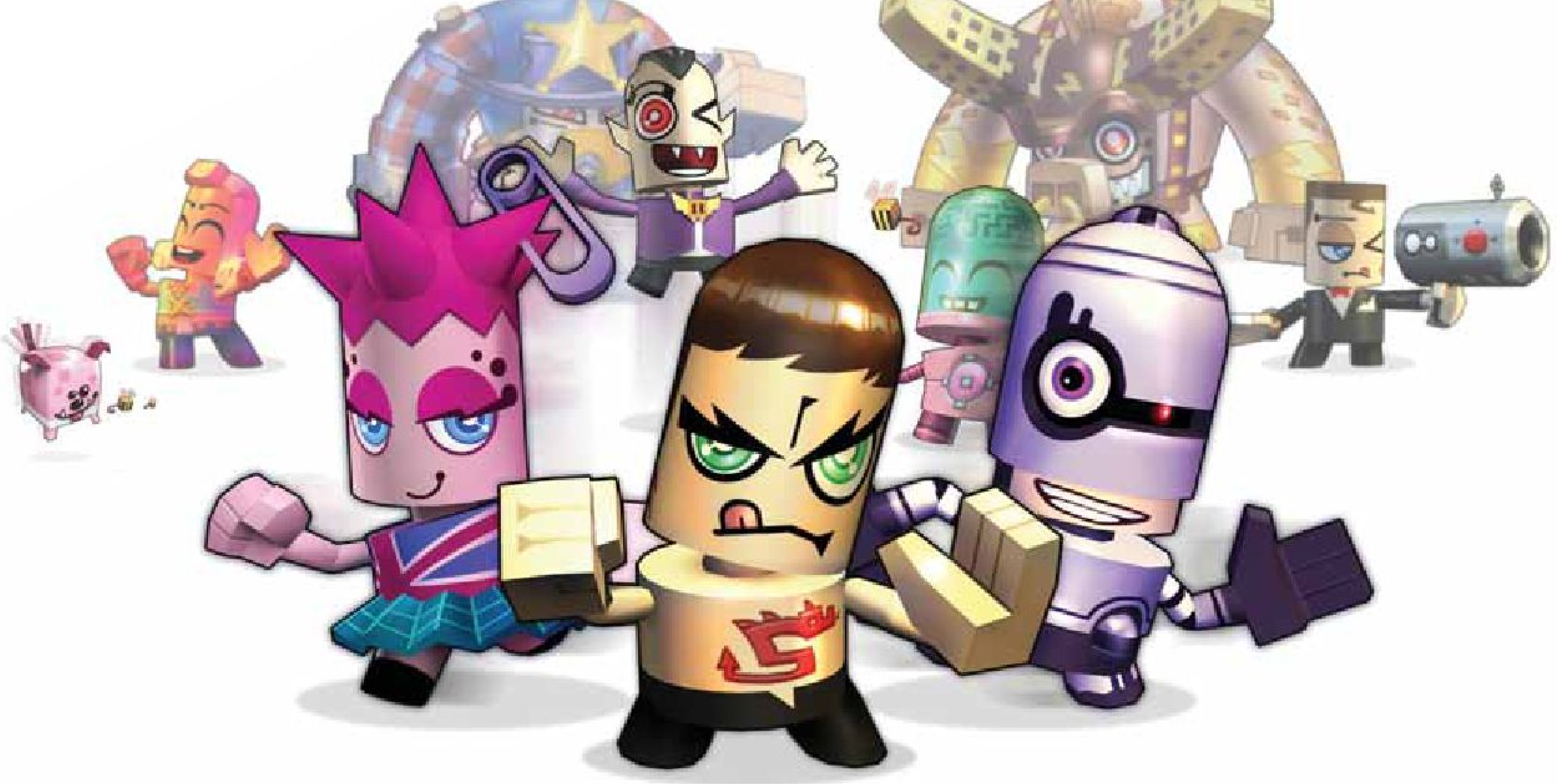
Guiding Light

Michael French visits EA's Guildford-based Bright Light studio to learn out about its journey to create a new casual kids franchise, and why the team has torn up the rulebook on the way…



Change is in the air at Guildford, the south-of-London city which has always been a key spot for games development in the UK but has seen a resurgence of late. From the recent spate of newly-opened outfits – such as Kuju's Doublesix and Codemasters' new studio – through to hotly-watched independents like Media Molecule and its Microsoft-owned alma mater Lionhead, the area is booming.

Things are no different at EA's Bright Light studio, the recently-rebranded and now casual-focused group in EA UK which towers over its Guildford contemporaries both literally (thanks to its lofty spot in the newer Electronic Arts Guildford high-rise offices) and historically (the team proudly toasts a heritage that includes the likes *Theme Park*, *Syndicate*, *Populous* and *Dungeon Keeper* by way of EA's 1995 Bullfrog acquisition).

In mid-2008 Bright Light finds itself at an interesting time in EA's overall history. With CEO John Riccitiello returning to the lead the company last year, the 'Change Agenda' he has since put in place famously restructured the firm into four labels – one of which is the Casual Entertainment imprint Bright Light now reports to.

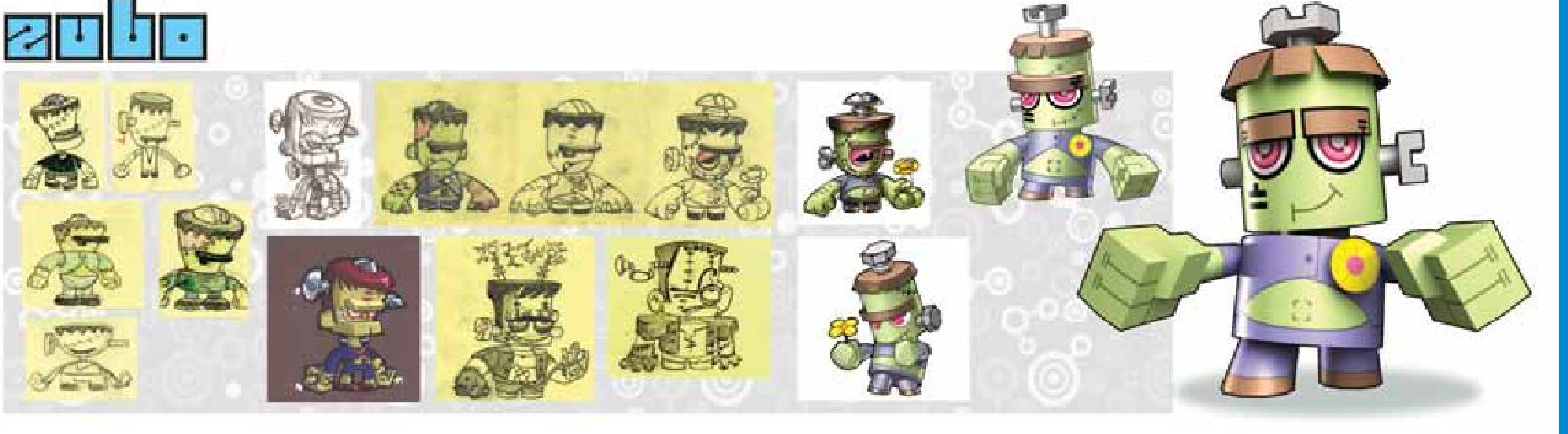
At the same time, EA has been on widely-reported hunt for new ideas and fresh IP. *Skate* last year helped usher in this new era, outselling rival *Tony Hawk* by almost two to one. But EA being EA it doesn't want just one fresh new franchise, it wants a stable of them, ready to set the company up for future success. And a few years ago, the team at Bright Light (back when it had just been organised into its previous incarnation EA UK), was charged with tackling this same challenge.

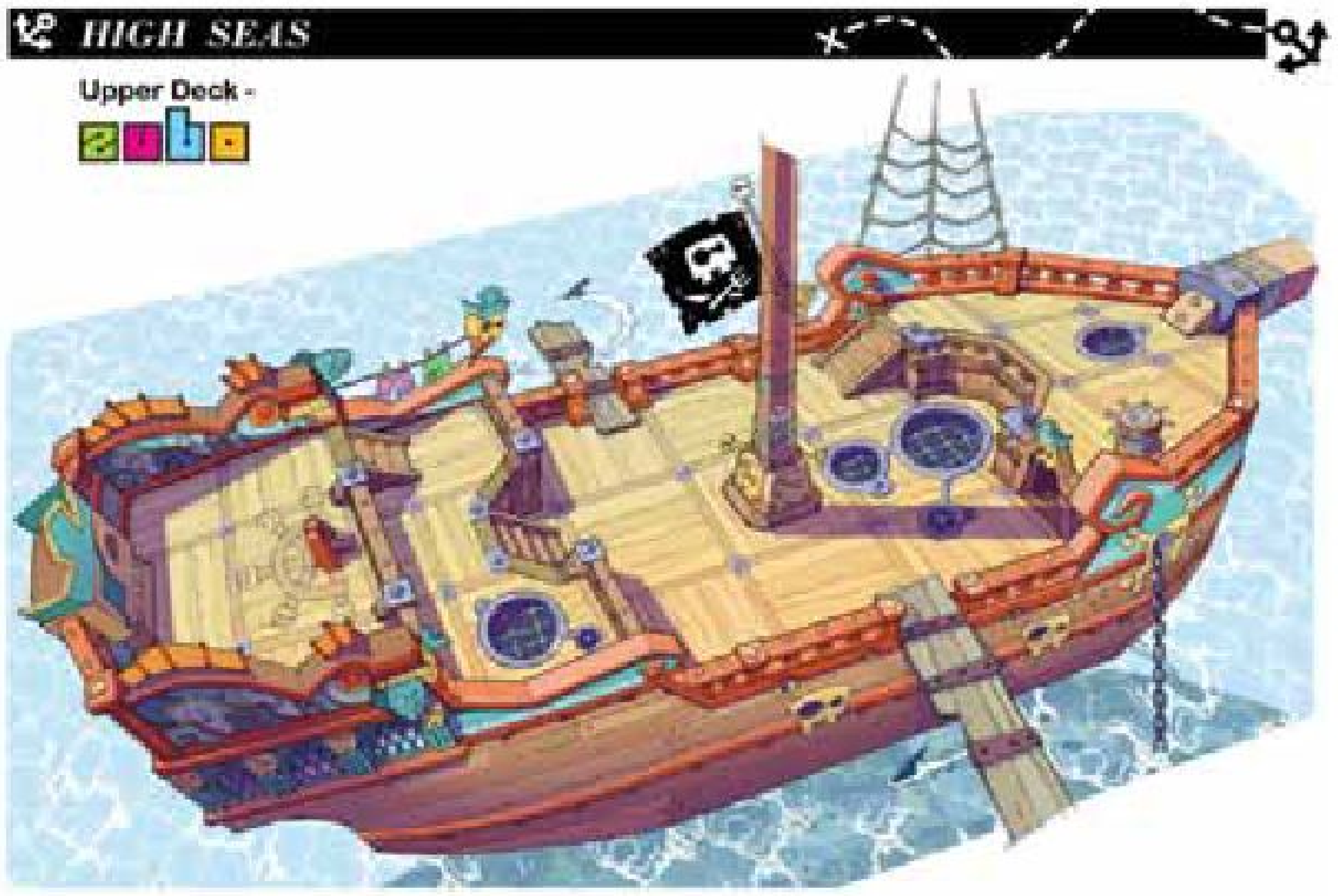
> ***"What might surprise you is how the team's insistence on rule-breaking has helped contribute to EA's new corporate culture…"***

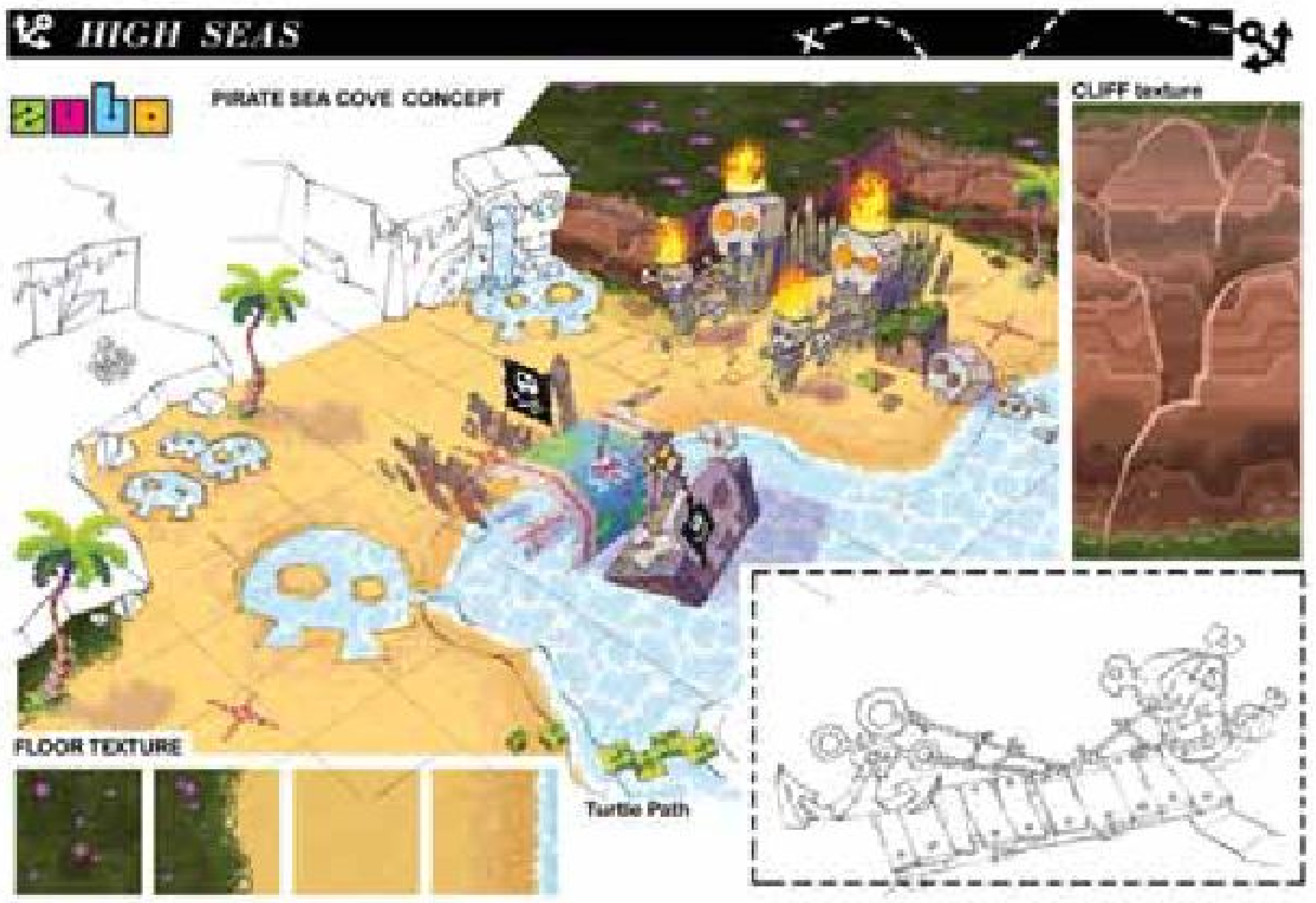
You won't be surprised to hear that Bright Light's developers say their answer – a new Nintendo DS children's rhythm-action game called *Zubo* set for release later this year – proves that lightning can strike twice in corporate confines, creating and fostering a new idea from nothing. But what might surprise you is how the team's rule-breaking insistence and focus, and a willingness to argue back with their bosses, helped contribute to EA's new corporate culture – which is being watched by many in the industry.

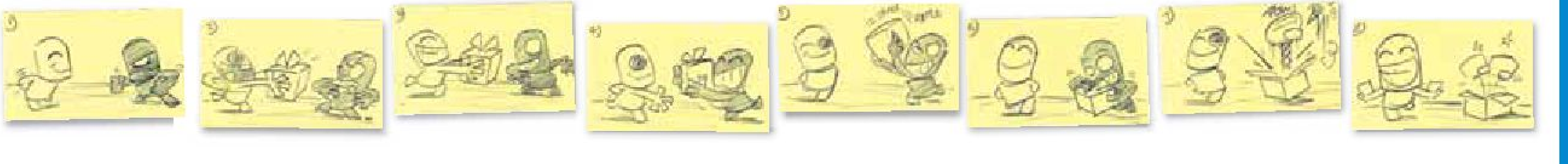
BRIGHT LIGHTNING

Zubo's rule-breaking nature was inherent at the start of its inception – back before it even had a name, explains executive producer Rob O'Farrell. Early on it was decided that the team, which originally cut its teeth as the handheld-focused Fusion unit creating the likes of *Burnout Legends*, would be flexing its muscles toned making the portable *Harry Potter* titles to build a new kids IP. O'Farrell and concept artist Jacques Gauthier took a cue from that licence and chose to focus from the









start on something that would be just as character driven and distinct.

"We wanted to be able to build a world through characters, and something which could have strength and longevity," O'Farrell explains to *Develop* in a room at EA's UK studio base (Criterion are on the next floor) that is filled with Zubo concept artwork. "I didn't want anything where you could say 'I've seen this before'," he explains, pointing regularly to a *Zubo* poster which features the games 55 individual 'Zubo' characters, which young players meet in the gameworld.

But games for children – "*good* games for children," O'Farrell stresses – are hard to get right. "In kids' character games you've got to see the characters and go 'wow' straight away and see the life in the characters," he says, pointing out that the biggest kids game hits of recent times, *Lego Star Wars* and *Pokémon*, worked their charms via animation and style. And while 'make the next *Pokémon*' is easy to write on paper, it's not something you can magic out of thin air, even after years building digital recreations of Hogwarts.

So the team shut itself off from the rest of EA and rejected a timetable for production, instead kicking about ideas and character concepts for a number of months – a stark difference to many other games, whether produced at EA or not, which can have a somewhat rushed concept art phase.

"It was very different, being allowed to let everything go. It means we were asking more questions, but it was much more liberating in a creative sense," says Gauthier, who adds that the months spent refining the concept work meant that the style of the game was very definite before a single line of code was written.

> ***"Being allowed to let everything go was much more liberating in a creative sense..."***
>
> ***Jacques Gauthier, Concept Artist***

Indeed, *Develop*'s first encounter with *Zubo*, back when it went under another name, was during a previous visit to the EA Guildford office over a year ago and a chance wander past the *Zubo* team with its walls covered in character artwork. The watchful eyes and ushering hands of a PR quickly dragged us away – but even then the artistic vision was as clear as it is on our cover artwork and across these pages today.

But the secretive nature meant that the team was under the radar for quite a long time at EA – for both good and ill. Explains O'Farell: "We started becoming referred to as this secret-type project that people heard about, but didn't really know anything concrete on. We didn't have a SKU plan at that point – something unusual for EA because that means no ship date.

"It caused arguments – because it was an unusual thing, that not every one knew about, and it had no revenue against it but was spending money on pre-production," he admits, but the team took a chance and chose to ignore the accountants. "We just wanted to get a feel for the characters. And because we

Above: Artist Jacques Gauther spent almost six months working on concept work which laid the foundations of the Zubo character designs and much of the title's overall style

SOUNDS GOOD

Of course music is of paramount importance in a rhythm action game – and is even more crucial to get right on a format like the DS, which head of audio Lydia Andrew says can pose a problem from the off.

"One the things that is most important in a game where half the experience is driven by music is to understand how players interact and treat music on that platform. And on the DS it turns out that people, on the whole, turn the sound off, so we've had to make music that convinces them not to," she explains.

The game has 13 music tracks that accompany in-game battles and which players must tap the DS touchscreen in time with at key moments.

"From a technical point of view that music has been incredibly complex to write. Every piece of music has to have exactly the same BPM, tempo and key construction to fit within the rhythm of the battle's rhythm action mechanic."

And while the art team on Zubo was allowed to gestate and form their ideas, likewise the audio team has been encouraged to find new ways to fulfill its creative vision.

The first of these was to do a lot of research in the spectrum of playback on the DS' speakers, and work out how you could program audio to sound the best it can in those response ranges, explains Andrew.

"It's something we know a lot of games get wrong on handheld – I loved *Loco Roco*'s sound, for instance, but the minute you took the headphones out it just folded in on itself and it was full of hiss. So we can't just hope people listen on headphones – we want to make sure that if kids play it with the speakers on it grabs them and isn't…" She shudders at the thought of low-quality audio – in the way only a game audio programmer could.

Another change has been embracing MIDI files for audio playback on the DS – a necessity as WAV files of each track would take up too much room on the cartridge. "At the very start of the project I was concerned about having to use MIDI – in my head it sounds like 'plinky plonky' music – and I kept asking if could have the biggest DS cart ever and just put lots of music files in there."

What turned the situation around was a revamp of the studio's audio pipeline, producing what Andrew calls another 'first for EA'. The studio now has a batch processing system built into its pipeline which is set to optimise, via a series of plugins, audio files to be played back on a DS.

Explains Andrew: "It maximises every aspect of a sound to its best – and has worked wonders for us. We've got some sparkly sounds which you'd think would sound dreadful on a DS, but have run through the pipeline and have been boosted to work in that spectrum of sound."

kept quiet, there was ultimately no interference."

And, in time, the people signing the cheques eventually saw the upside as the artwork and concept designs continued to impress and capture imaginations. "This was very much out of EA's comfort zone. We are used to sports games, used to FPS games – but not used to things like this, so we were allowed the extra time to find out what makes these things work. Because we kept quiet – and never at any point said 'oh, we've got this great game here already, let's announce it to the press' – there was no pressure, and no one telling us what to do or trying to meddle."

DESIGNATED DRIVING

As the team refined its ideas, they found themselves continuing to push against the 'EA regime' (our words, not theirs). And when the time came to actually designing a gameplay mechanic that featured the characters, the team let the art drive the direction, rather than follow any corporate mandate.

Having created a cast of 55 characters, one art prototype featured each Zubo on its own collectible playing card, which proved a compulsive part of the pitching process. The team would often just take the cards to exec meetings instead of code or artwork; at a senior level, EA chief creative officer Bing Gordon was a big fan of the cards because of their tactile nature.

"Because the cards had been so popular, we looked at how that would work if the characters existed in a card game," says game designer Dom Oldrey. "But it soon became apparent that while *we* were having a lot of fun, other players weren't enjoying the game. It was becoming very strategy focused, almost like chess." So, in another instance of the team rejecting what execs liked in favour of gut instinct, Oldrey revamped the card game idea into a battle system that crossed scissor-paper-stone with collectible card games. He explains that the result is a blend of Top Trumps mixed with resource management elements – and then invites *Develop* to play a physical version of it because the team, of course, had made a new mock-up of the card game, complete with cards, rules and battle board. The result is very playable, and boasts the makings of a solid core gameplay mechanic, or the 'five minutes of replayable fun' which any designer will admit is crucial to both core games experiences, such as *Halo* and *Pokemon*, and casual ones like *Minesweeper* and *Bejewelled*.

> ***"The industry as a whole acknowledges that it needs to start making new IPs and find the right ways to do it…"***
> ***Rob O'Farrell, Executive Producer***

But even when turned into software, the team felt the idea still wasn't perfect. "At that point, we had something that was probably okay to work from – we could have finished it and shipped it, but it wouldn't have been the game it is now," says Oldrey.

A software prototype of the card game soon provided more feedback – although the battling card prototype was fun, people testing the game had more fun with a last minute battle mechanic that had been put in to make players press a button at a certain time during battle to obtain more powerful attacks. It provided a brainwave moment that Oldrey says wouldn't have come about if the game hadn't been continually prototyped.

"It became fairly clear incredibly quickly that we should be doing rhythm action," he says, adding that "the characters make that kind of experience a lot more enjoyable than something like the beat-matching games which are all rhythm, no action." (We've pulled out a special look at the audio elements in *Zubo* – *see 'Sounds Good', above.*)

It's at this point you might think that *Zubo*'s story ends, with a SKU-plan finally rolled out, and the game rushed into production for anything that could host it; PSP, Wii, PC, 360… but not so for the Bright Light team. The near-stubborn, singular vision driving the team's behaviour extended itself to the game's target format – *Zubo*, at least at first, is only arriving on one system: the DS.

"We want to make a console-quality game for the DS," says O'Farrell, acknowledging that the single-format approach goes against the conventional wisdom that says a new IP needs to hit as many formats at once to make money. "But there's no reason why the DS should be seen as the second cousin for games content. Especially when the market is so big."

Producer Michael Heywood adds: "I hope we've proven already that we're really committed to innovation, and we wanted to use that push the platform's boundaries further. It's a new IP – we shouldn't have to just do tried and tested methods with the artwork and do a disservice to the characters we've created."

O'Farrell agrees. "And sticking to DS keeps us focused on quality. We've really had to focus on quality because we're ultimately looking at

Bright Light's efforts have been so investigative the team has even built a working (and, we reckon, very marketable post-launch) card game used to hammer out the Zubo battle mechanics

EYE OF THE FORMAT HOLDER

A unique relationship with Nintendo has helped Bright Light berak more ground for EA.

Multiple trips to the see the format-holder's in Japan and regular build updates have helped gain invaluable feedback, making *Zubo* is one of the first EA projects where the company has shown another its work in progress at crucial points in a project's development.

"It's been really useful for us – they've been clear about what they like about the game and don't like. It's helped drive the build and show where we are now," says O'Farrell.

Since the dialogue between the two first opened, a team at Kyoto has been playing through levels and giving advice on a regular basis. It's a process that goes beyond the evaluation done by the firm's in-house testing team Mario Club. "The problem with that process was that you'd get feedback, and sometimes you wouldn't agree with it, but it was too late in the day to take it on board anyway," says O'Farrell. Involving Nintendo earlier on has provided an invaluable way to improve the game's quality.

"The great thing now is that they are involved in the process, and we have time to take on their feedback. They have given us lots of constructive criticism. It was all valid and we've taken it all on. And these are the guys who have helped make *Pokémon* – people we really respect, so when people like that give you feedback you make sure you listen."

an audience that EA doesn't necessarily hit," he says.

CORPORATE MAGIC

All through the extended production (the game is now into an alpha stage, with lots of bug testing already under way early in production – another attempt to buck the trends of development), O'Farrell and his team took a cue from their work with, of all people, J. K. Rowling to work out how they would continue to secure exec buy-in. And, they say, it turns out that the bosses at EA actually appreciate designers and developers who stick to their guns to maintain their vision.

"Working with Jo Rowling and learning from her process really helped us understand how to control, decide and adapt our fiction," says O'Farrell. "Often on the *Harry Potter* games Jo would be very accommodating to us, but sometimes she would just say no to our ideas, and explain why suggesting something wouldn't work in the context of the fiction. That was a great learning process. Likewise we have had to be really firm – and here we've learnt that they [motions skyward as if to point to senior EA execs] really respect it when you argue back."

O'Farrell adds that in time it became increasingly clear to all involved that for a company like EA to learn about fostering an environment which encouraged new IP it would have to allow for creative push and pull – and more flexible deadlines – than it had previously.

"It was hard sometimes, because exec members – on previous projects – sometimes want a game they are overseeing to be the game *they* want to make, and not the game everyone else wants, or should be making. I felt that changed with *Zubo* – and the execs here really learnt, and we end up coming out of meetings having won our side on a certain point. Sometimes it's not the case, and we get a bollocking – but you know they still support us and believe in our ability to deliver.

"It's been a learning curve for us, and has been revolutionary for everyone. I think other teams at EA are now going to know that 'if *Zubo* can do it, so can we'. It's already happening at EA and elsewhere in other companies – the same kind of thing is happening with *Dead Space* at EA LA for instance, and I think the industry as a whole acknowledges that it needs to start generating new IPs, but find the right ways to do it."

But the fact that *Zubo* survived the change to this process, and many of the problems inherent at the 'old EA' (for a time the firm was notorious for having produced numerous projects that were canned just before they hit alpha), is all the more remarkable. In *Zubo*'s behind-the-scenes lifespan, it has been under the stewardship of three different general managers as the EA UK operation shifted and changed until settling down into two separate studios – Bright Light and neighbour Criterion Games.

> **"In making Zubo we never wanted to draw on anything else. It had to have its own identity..."**
>
> **Harvey Elliott, General Manager**

In chatting with the latest of those GMs, Bright Light head Harvey Elliott, *Develop* gets the sense that *Zubo* isn't just a special project given time to breathe, but also emblematic of the mood at the studio. Clearly, the studio and its teams feel they are just as worthy of attention as Criterion and its popular *Burnout* franchise (and given that Bright Light is working on *Zubo*, a new *Potter* title and games based on Hasbro properties – all part of EA's new Casual Entertainment label – it's hard not to agree). And as the story of *Zubo*'s creation shows, the team wants to prove that games don't always have to be made under the same constraints as those that went before them.

"We always wanted to have, alongside *Potter*, something that was original, a bit more risky and unproven like *Zubo*. And then further along something that united both of that and was a bit more family oriented, like our new Hasbro games," explains Elliott on his overall plan for Bright Light.

"In making *Zubo*, we never really wanted it to draw on anything else – it has very much had to be its own thing, and have its own identity. And I think the fact that, while the game has been in the works for three and a bit years, it still feels fresh to many of us – there is something in it that really draws people in – which speaks a great deal to how that process has worked.

"And we've been very careful internally not to throw up our hands and go 'Hey everybody, this is a franchise!', because at some point someone has to step up and say 'Well, this is the product'. That's why we thought it was right to focus as much on DS as we can. Once it's released – that's when we we'll figure out what might happen next. That's been one of the great challenges, exciting and frustrating for various people, about the game. We're learning to make these new games for new casual audiences in a totally new way."

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NEW HORIZONS

Last month some members from the advisory board for June's Codeworks GameHorizon convened to talk shop. **Develop** took the chance to grill the assembled execs on the games market. Here's what they had to say…

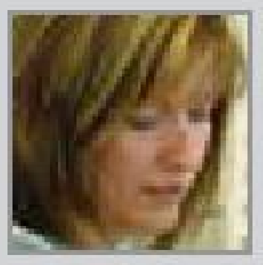
THE ADVISORS

- **Darren Jobling** Chairman of the GameHorizon advisory board, Director of Business Development at Eutechnyx

- **Darren Falcus** Managing Director of Atomic Planet

- **Simon Prytherch** Managing Director of DevelopTrak

- **Nick Rooke** Account Manager, Xbox and Games for Windows 3rd Party Publishing at Microsoft



- **Carri Cunliffe** Head of Sector Development at Codeworks GameHorizon

- **Nina Cliff** Business Development Manager at Codeworks GameHorizon

The UK has reportedly become one of the most expensive places on the planet to develop a game. How can UK independents remain competitive in that climate?

Darren Jobling, Eutechnyx: When it comes to making great games, I think money is not the deciding or limiting factor. There tends to be two tiers of developers – the bread and butter work-for-hire developer and then a higher realm of companies altogether. If a publisher wants Eutechnyx to develop their game, they just want them. It doesn't matter within reason how much it is, as long as the quality is there. I think we've gone past the stage where development expense is the deciding factor. Return on that development investment is the key.

Simon Prytherch, DevelopTrak: I think also that UK studios tend to be good at delivering on time, design and creative gameplay, programming and so on. If you're working with partners in Europe and the Far East you're actually able to keep the costs down.

Darren Falcus, Atomic Planet: I think through collaboration and working together locally – that's another way you can do things more cost-effectively.

DJ: The UK independents historically have been through some bad times so they know how to make the most of the good times – they have become very cost effective at what they do. Like us, some have got subsidiaries in lower cost base areas of the world or employ sub-contractors in those regions. Although salary costs might be high in the UK, I think independent developers are still competitive and offer great value for your money.

Carri Cunliffe, GameHorizon: UK networks like GameHorizon are helping smaller independents work with larger companies in their regions to gain a track record and industry contacts. On the other hand, the larger companies can benefit from smaller regional companies who can offer reliable outsource services.

Nick Rooke, Microsoft: As a whole, the UK as a place to work and live retains its talent very well. I know there's migration to Canada and Far East, but looking at the talent pool I'd say we're well placed.

DJ Personally, I don't see any sort of crisis. In reality, most independent developers they feel like they've been working all of their careers to get to this point. You feel like you're on the crest of a wave.

Much attention been put on what the games industry may learn from the Web 2.0 world; but that industry is arguably more spontaneous - it invests small and targets growth after a product or service is launched. Does the games industry, with its big budgets and dominating corporations, have it in its blood to create games in that way?

DF: I don't think that the Web 2.0 industry is necessarily spontaneous. This industry can develop downloadable games in a short period

of time enabling us to react to the latest trends and interests.

DJ: One of the real opportunities going forward is using the skills we've learnt in games and applying them to the Web 2.0 world. I think that's where indies can really shine. I think we can learn a great deal from a lot of the community stuff. Web 2.0 isn't relying on the technology – it's ingenuity that creates the really good sites and the games industry can learn a lot from that.

CC: I think you could argue the games industry is actually more creative and they are developing real community products with social and entertainment capabilities.

DJ: Someone is going to create a casual game that has 100 million subscribers and it's just as likely to come from downtown Newcastle as it is from downtown New York. Some studio somewhere is going to use the skills they've learnt in the games industry, apply them to Web 2.0 and make a lot of money. That is the opportunity.

SP: The small independents are still where the real creativity and innovation comes from because they can afford to take more risk.

CC: The big global players such as Warner Bros, Disney, Viacom also have their part to play in the games industry, but it will be interesting to see if they merely buy the smaller creative companies or they can actually recreate this creativity internally.

DJ: I think we'll always have big players, but we see them pile into the industry and pile back out again shortly afterwards. For me it's one of the cycles we go through. I think this time it's a little different. I think the indies with the stomach for the challenge will succeed as they now have access to the delivery systems. If you're a content provider your value will go through the roof over the next five years, so I think it's a great time to be an indie. The deals you can do and the big budgets are a great opportunity.

NR: One of the great things about Web 2.0 is the fact that products can launch and then receive added content. We've seen that work successfully in the games industry with *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, which are constantly added to during their lifetime. But, evolving from that, we have games like *Halo 3*, for example, which has a full online mode in there for creating levels, sharing this world, and to me that's what Web 2.0 represents. I don't think that being a big budget company precludes you from doing that kind of stuff.

DF: In the past you just didn't think about serving that community once your game was out there. An online scoreboard was about as much as you did to serve the community who were playing your games.

DJ: Historically you used to just put the game out and that was that. We are now in an era where a new mindset has taken over… thinking about serving an online community with ongoing content.

NR: In the future, we'll see much more of things such as blending social networks with gaming. *Spore*, for example, will have YouTube directly integrated into it. That sort of thing is going to be huge in the future.

> ***"A casual game with 100 million subscribers is just as likely to come from Newcastle as it is New York…"***
>
> ***Darren Jobling, Eutechnyx***

How are emergent sectors like the casual games market and the rise of mass market gaming impacting the business for games developers?

NR: The biggest thing for me is validating 'approachability' in gaming – people paid lip service to casual gaming before, but they weren't focusing on user interface and physical peripherals to bring people into games. Now that's been validated through the motion-sensing controllers and *Guitar Hero* and suchlike, so I think it's made people open to the fact that technology is not the only thing that's going to drive things forward – it's the accessibility. It's about bringing things down to allow more people in, reducing complexity but retaining depth, and I think that will be a good thing for games generally.

DJ: I think the casual games market has revolutionised how traditional console developers are working. Eutechnyx has effectively split in half – one half working on next gen console games and the other working on an MMO targeted at the casual games market. I don't think developers will drop everything they're doing and jump headlong into the casual games market – but I do think you're going to get this split that takes off within the casual games market. Being a content provider is generally a much better way of getting rewarded for what you're doing.

DF: Even having broadband in every house now has made games more accessible to everyone.

Nina Cliff, GameHorizon: The target market is 25 to 40-year-olds but a lot of these people wouldn't know where casual games portals are. Do they know that PopCap's out there, for example? It's how to reach that audience that needs to be addressed.

DF: It is difficult. I think, as Darren said earlier, until there's an online game that reaches 100 million people, I don't think we'll have a game that's truly mass market. I think at the moment we're only ten percent of the way there.

DJ: What we should be thinking about is the possibilities behind simple games. Just look at what happened with online poker – £50m staked every day up until recently – that's the possibility. It's a question of thinking creatively about what you're doing so that your games are not intimidating to the average person on the street. A good example is a driving game – just thinking of ways that you can easily control a car for a mass market customer.

NC: So how do you see the Wii and the DS affecting the market for developers?

DJ: I think Wii and DS are a bit of red herring – your average indie developer doesn't make a lot of money from making Wii and DS games. Research has shown that once the average consumer has bought their initial Wii pack it takes them a long time to buy more games afterwards. I think casual games have a much greater scope for development.

DF: It's worth noting, though, that the Wii and DS have whetted people's appetite.

They've opened the door for people who might not otherwise have been interested in games.

SP: Yes… the average 30-year-old woman would probably not have played games two years ago before the Wii and DS. But today, a lot more of them are – as well as others who would've been 'non-gamers' a short while ago. Free to play with micro transactions is also going to be huge.

DJ: Nexon, the Korean developer, were the size of most UK independents before the micro transaction game *Kart Rider* exploded, getting 60 million microtransations per month. This shows that an indie can come up with something unique and it explodes. MTV have bought *Kart Rider* for America so it will be interesting to see what happens there.

What needs to be done by studios to maintain a good quality level of staff coming in to the UK games industry?

DJ: If you look at what your average graduate is capable of doing when they walk through the door, and at what they're doing nine months later, the difference is phenomenal. University is valuable, but getting them to apply it to commercial environment is a totally different skill set. Eutechnyx is forging stronger links with universities, getting to know the grads and taking a long term view. Running things like placements don't give you a short term benefit, but they do give you a long term benefit. Historically there wasn't a lot of communication between studios and universities, but I think it's been transformed over the past three years. We're now contributing to syllabuses, external examining and inviting universities on to studio tours. Grads think studios are these ivory towers and we are doing a lot of this activity to break down myths and barriers through Eutechnyx' Level Up Development Programme.

> ***"When we exhibit at recruitment fairs we're competing with Sony, Codemasters and EA straight off so you've got to be a bit more savvy…"***
>
> ***Darren Falcus, Atomic Planet***

DF: It's just educating and communicating with universities. One on our doorstep – we got seven interviews arranged. It's just something you've got to do to communicate.

CC: I think it's important for games companies to actually market themselves within their region to universities so that students know where the games industry is in their region. Companies need to start forming relationships with key academics to ensure they know who are the good candidates as well as exploring opportunities to do project based work with students or placements. GameHorizon has been running a placement scheme for three years and it has enabled the industry to place more students as well as retain some of the better ones. The North East is a great place to develop a career in games.

DJ: In the past, the bigger companies were in there with their professional recruitment people grabbing people from under your nose. What the indies are doing now is being that little bit savvier to make sure they get as good a shot of it as the bigger players.

DF: When we exhibit at recruitment fairs we're competing with Sony, Codemasters and EA straight off so you've got to be a bit more savvy. It's necessary to constantly evolve the way you communicate with graduates coming into the business, and also with the universities.

DJ: I passionately believe that in terms of a career for talented people, independent development is streets ahead of its corporate counterpart. I see these big corporate development factories as like working for McDonalds. I see indies as being more like working at Gordon Ramsay's.

SP: You can be a very small cog in a big wheel. At a small company you'll get to work in a lot more areas.

DJ: If you are good, you stand a much better chance of being recognised and rewarded quicker at an independent studio.

CC: The UK is a bit of creative hotbed in terms of games development. A lot of graduates we talk to aren't looking to move away, to the US, for example. People do see the UK as the place to start their career.

SP: The UK is streets ahead in creativity. You look at every creative industry – film, fashion, car design, they are all headed up by UK people. Over here we take it for granted that we're creative. But when you go elsewhere it's really appreciated.

DJ: There's still a lot of work to be done. Every studio seems to have their own scheme that they're starting up, so we are heading in the right direction in terms of getting better courses and better grads that are making better employees. Things are just getting better. There's too much proprietary code in your average development company for graduates to be able to step out of university and hit the ground running. They'll always face a steep learning curve. We'll be sharing a lot of these recruitment ideas at the conference.

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GAMEHORIZON CONFERENCE

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08

Of course, the advisory board also discussed plans for its two-day exec-focused conference which takes place next month.

A single-track event, it is "aimed towards the real industry decision makers whether they be format holders, publisher, developers or VCs," says Codeworks' Carri Cunliffe. "The conference will give the delegate the chance to meet leading industry thinkers as well as influential business people."

Eutechnyx' Darren Jobling adds that the team is aiming to make it "the only executive event in the European calendar. And it will provide a lot of thought provoking material for those ready to take on the challenges of the next couple of years."

WHEN: June 18th & 18th
WHERE: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Newcastle-Gateshead
KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
Day One: Chris Satchell, General Manager and Chief XNA Architect, Microsoft
Day Two: Seamus Blackley, Head of Games, Creative Artists Agency

STANDOUT SESSIONS:
The 'Long Tail' in Game Development (Panel Discussion)
Speakers: Mario Rizzo (business development manager, Realtime Worlds), Chris Lee (commercial director, FreeStyleGames), Julien Merceron (CTO, Eidos), Mark Rein (Epic Games)
The Business of Games
Speakers: Rick Gibson (director, Games Investor Consulting), Rod Cousens (CEO, Codemasters)
Games in the Media
Speakers: Robert Bond (lawyer, Speechley Bircham), Iain Simons (director, GameCity)

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This is not hardcore

Inspired by his transition from gunplay to pie fights, **Caspar Field** examines how the industry's new future in social and casual games was sparked by the very origins of games development…

I think we need to talk seriously about the custard pie shader." Week one, day one, meeting one at Relentless Software, and I can't help crack a grin at the things people say in development meetings. Hold the page, flick back a few chapters, and I'm in another meeting at another company, discussing the way flecks of fresh blood can be viewed using a character's thermal imaging goggles. It feels strange to tell my parents that this is modern entertainment; but it is, I often enjoy it, and I helped create it.

Back in today, I'm a senior producer at Relentless in Brighton, developer of the *Buzz!* series of titles. Shipping with a pack of four colourful buzzer controllers, *Buzz!* has played a key role in the explosion of 'casual' and 'social' games over the past few years (or at least in the industry's understanding of what those things can be). But in my shift from discussing blood letting to pie fights, I've naturally found myself pondering 'what is this casual thing all about?'

I've come to the conclusion that today's social games are a collision of two main influences, clamped around our creative thinking like the claw of some particularly persistent lobster. One pincer comes in the form of the peripheral-based exhibitionist games that bubbled up out of Japan in the late '90s. The other is Web 2.0, which continues to excite and entertain with new ways of communicating and informing.

Those peripheral-based games, which counted Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution* and Sega's *Samba De Amigo* among their number, changed the industry's perception of what the public wanted – and what it was willing to pay for. Gamers (and I believe it was gamers who evangelised these titles to their 'casual' friends) threw down their pads and got funky with a dancing monkey. Nearly a decade on, we have thousands of non-gamer punters happily shelling out over £100 to enjoy two-player sessions of *Guitar Hero III*.

The stars of Web 2.0 – Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Digg and others you'll know well – have broken new ground in defining both entertainment and social interaction. But slipstreaming those frontrunners are casual gaming sites such as Miniclip, Neopets and EA's Pogo.com, all hugely successful (the first two are global top-200 websites) yet largely unheeded by the 'traditional' videogames industry. These sites often offer a return to simple, well-honed, undemanding game mechanics (check out Raph Koster's notes on the three line instructions of the original Pong arcade machine), and a similar reincarnation of the three minute gameplay 'burst' that served Atari's world-changing coin-op so well. Can we call Pong the original social game?

> ***"Websites and web games may seriously affect the bottom lines across the industry. This is developer as agent for revolutionary change…"***

Koster specifically is betting big that the next generation of websites and web games might seriously affect bottom lines across the traditional videogame industry. And this is developer as agent for revolutionary change. But in the short term, what Miniclip et al have done is to help remind game developers – and the public – that *Half-Life* and *Halo* are clearly not for everyone. In short, the modern 'interactive experience' as typified by *Assassin's Creed* is revealed to be merely one answer, not the answer. Publishers' accountants everywhere, take note.

Which brings me back to *Buzz!*, Relentless' casual party quiz game that's tickled millions of happy players – and also back to that lobster's pincers. Peripheral-based; well, that's pretty obvious. Web 2.0? Look to the variety of gameplay, aesthetically-friendly visuals, quickfire duration and, in its upcoming PS3 incarnation, a literal as well as metaphorical internet link. Players will be able to create their own quizzes on a website and share them with others, both on their own consoles and across the web, while in-game pages offer information about the online community – the social community that forms around any game.

For me, this is the beginning of a golden road – a pathway into a rich field of entertainment delights that are ripe for the picking. User-created content is a proven success; in truth it always was (starting with EA's *Pinball Construction Set*). We, as an industry, would be missing a very large trick not to put creative tools in the hands of our customers – not map editors but simple, massmarket-friendly doors into our virtual worlds. Having recently listened to a group of four 20-something women create, discuss and amend their Mii avatars for well over an hour, I can say with some confidence that this is not hardcore. And it is the future.

www.relentless.co.uk

***Caspar Field** is senior producer at Relentless. He was previously producer at Eidos and Argonaut and worked as a journalist for Edge and DC-UK*

Truth of Dare

Dare to be Digital is probably the most highly-regarded event in the games and education part of the industry's yearly – and busy – calendar. **Michael French** speaks to Paul Durrant of organiser Abertay University to look back at how the competition has united the industry and talk about what lies in its future…

If someone had told you a decade ago that by 2008 British games software companies would have united to contribute to an educational initiative that promotes getting new talent into the games industry, you may well have believed them. But perhaps not the extent of such a scheme's effect. Because in the past ten years Dare to be Digital has arguably become one of the de facto events that underlines where education and games overlap, and positively contributes back to the industry.

Organised by Abertay University, the event tasks small groups of students to, in just two months, produce a game from initial concept to working prototype. During the competition, the entrants get feedback and mentoring from participating studios. Since its first iteration as an internal Abertay event in 1999 through to its status today, as a UK-wide challenge that also invites teams from India and China to take part – as well as boasting a big cash investment from Channel 4 – the goal had always been to help facilitate progress in the games education field, but the groundswell of support for the program has surprised even the organisers, who have managed its steady growth.

Abertay University's Dare to be Digital contest has united the games industry towards the issue of finding quality talent, says Paul Durrant (pictured)

"The response has been tremendous – there aren't many developers we knock on the doors of who aren't prepared to put some time to it, and their time is precious as it is," says Abertay's director of business development Paul Durrant, who has worked on Dare to be Digital since its inception. "It's unique in terms of the way the industry has come together – obviously they come together in trade associations, but this is different in that it is hands-on and they have to roll up their sleeves and muck in."

TALENT SHOW

Of course, much interest comes from the fact it gets studios close to prospective employees.

Explains Durrant: "A high proportion of it is interest in talent development – that's a key factor. Of course, while a lot of the studios have very sophisticated recruitment practices, the graduate recruitment rate isn't actually that high. Working with Dare means that they get the chance to test the graduate before hiring them – almost without employing them – which is appealing, especially for those who want a rounded graduate to sit well in their team."

But the quality of entrants means Dare has a real watermark standard amongst recruiters as well. "There's a classic quote from people we speak to, which is 'When a CV has Dare on it they go to the top of the pile'," adds Durrant.

In recent years the competition has advanced greatly, including plenty of support from public agencies and broadcast firms, regional host centres alongside the one run at Abertay and international students – the latter of which has helped promote Dare's status as an incubator of talent out to the rest of the world.

"The international element speaks a great deal to the quality of talent we bring in. Last year's Chinese team were BAFTA nominees, and now all of that team are now working for Microsoft China," explains Durrant. "The international dimension helped bring in people who wouldn't normally get seen in the usual recruitment cycle."

And although last year Abertay hosted the international teams, "many host centres have indicated they would take on an international team each as well," adds Durrant.

Dare is further poised for future growth as well after 2008's event for 2009 and onwards. The first step in this is Dare to Grow, an internship project funded by NESTA and put together with Tiga and Skillset which will provide certain Dare entrants a post-event placement at participating studios to work on an innovation project. "We'll be matchmaking a select number of companies with a select number of entrants to Dare so they can get work in a games company – and that will be doing an innovation project, not just coming in as a grunt, such a tools and pipeline initiative," explains Durrant.

At the same time, Durrant and the Dare team have two other projects this year. One of these is the Dare Serious Games strand, which is a pilot round of the competition looking soley serious games, hosted at the University of the West of Scotland. There other is Dare 360, which pushes the boundary further by seeing how Dare can be applied to non-games formats in the converged content sector.

Plus, for 2009, Durant is looking at further improving Dare, telling us he's working on a model that will "really open up the opportunity to any team anywhere to participate", incorporating a major sponsor and multiple regional stakeholder groups.

DARED TO BE DIFFERENT

But whatever grander aspirations the contest organisers may have, Durrant makes it clear that the core of the event, to promote and encourage people to learn more about the making of games and get students closer to studios, remains key.

ABOUT DARE '08

As we explain opposite, this year's Dare shows the competition go from strength to strength. Around 100 teams of five are expected to apply to participate, 20 of which will go through the full competition, which runs from June 4th to August 9th.

There are five host centres across the UK, in Brighton (University of Brighton), London (Goldsmiths University of London), Midlands (Birmingham City University), Scotland (Abertay University) and Ireland (Trinity College Dublin). International teams from China and India also participating.

A host of games firms from across the country are also on board, including Activision/DemonWare, Black Rock Studios, Blitz, Codemasters, Cohort, Denki, Eidos, Genuine Games, Microsoft, NCR, NCSoft, Proper Games, Rare, Realtime Worlds, Relentless, Sega, Sports Interactive, TPLD, and Zoe Mode. All of them are supporting the teams in some capacity through the likes of judging or team mentoring/visits.

DARE OUT THERE

Along with last month's announced substantial investment in Dare to be Digital from Channel 4, other broadcasters are key sponsors, including the BBC and Turner Broadcasting.
Dare has attracted lots of public agency support as well, with key supporters including: London Development Agency, Screen West Midlands/Advantage West Midlands, Scottish Enterprise Tayside, Scottish Government, Belfast City Council, The Digital Hub, Intertrade Ireland, Department of Education and Science Ireland, IDA Ireland and Dundee City Council.

Last year's competition saw the first ProtoPlay exhibition following the event, running alongside the Edinburgh Interactive Festival and then later in the year at London. The event, which showcases the entrants' games, has since been taken on tour. It's proven to be an invaluable way to give the public – of all ages – a glimpse of what the industry is capable of.

"Imagine if in two or three years we are showcasing fifty or sixty prototypes of new games made by young teams, put together under specific criteria and deadlines. There's nothing like that in the game industry which can help demonstrate all that talent," says Durrant. The fact that all the ideas are essentially new IPs isn't lost on him, either – it's certainly not lost on spectators within the industry.

"People are still interested in it, and there are talks and discussions going on about those properties and what might become of them," says Durrant.

Obviously, they are just prototypes: although often beloved by the competition's judges and those who sample them, there is still a jump needed to make them commercially ready, which Durrant makes clear. But the spark of creativity and quality they represent is important, not just for those with an eye on emerging talent sources, but the wider industry. Adds Durrant: "I think there is a significant interest in those games to, in time, create a chance for some great British games to come out of Dare."

www.daretobedigital.co.uk

ProtoPromotion

Although the competition finishes on August 9th, that isn't the end of the Dare story.

From August 10th to 12th the organisers are hosting Dare ProtoPlay alongside the Edinburgh Interactive Festival which will showcase the games prototyped during the 10 weeks. Consumers in Birmingham and London will also get to see the games during October thanks to a BAFTA showcase – plus, the thee winning teams from Dare 2008 will become the nominees for the 2009 BAFTA Ones to Watch Award. "Wherever we take these games we get a fantastic reaction from people, even when they are put alongside proprietary games," explains Durrant.

Abertay similarly showcased 2007's winners last year – and even took them to the consumer event Play.com in London earlier this year. "The games have been mobbed at all these events and we've had great feedback. There is an interest out there from those who want to see games that have been created by a bunch of talented students yet haven't gone through the commercial mill. That says a lot about the games and cultural themes that we tie well with."

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Advice From The Rec

EA's head of global talent brand, **Matthew Jeffery**, offers a guide for recruiters and those looking to move job…

Recruitment is a challenge. Attracting and retaining the best talent affects the bottom line and makes or breaks a business. And hiring staff is now a vital part of any studio's business strategy. And it has to be: The next 12 months will provide a host of challenges and opportunities for video games companies looking to attract and retain the best talent.

It is true that the *experienced* talent pool of games industry developers is shrinking – so as games companies increase in size and need talent to meet growth plans we often find oursevles competing with the film, music, IT and mobile sectors. With the following insights, trends and suggestions from the recruitment front line I hope to provide a guide for both developer recruitment teams as well as candidates to navigate the market in search of talent and jobs in this exciting industry.

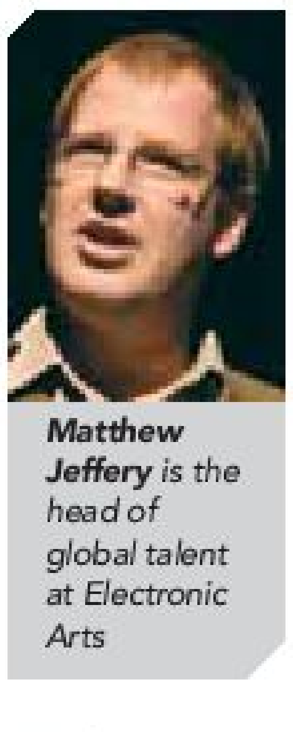
The industry needs to start taking a more proactive stance towards finding talent from outside the industry, says Jeffery (Image: EA DICE's Battlefield Bad Company)

RECRUITMENT CHESS

Taking the easy route and recruiting from competitors does not fulfil growth demands. It results in stalemate. The industry has become overly reliant on playing recruitment chess, taking employees from one competitor and then losing their own in return. While this approach may work in the short term, it won't benefit us in the long run as the industry's needs for fresh talent aren't met.

But weaning away from a habit is hard – so what are the solutions? To continue expanding, games companies need to start looking outside of the quick wins of gaming. There's a sea of great talent, many blissfully unaware of the great careers available in gaming. Talented programmers work in the IT sector, in the public sector, film, mobile… that's just scratching the surface of millions of talented individuals. Recently we hired a great AI programmer from a missile defence company working with the MOD. Project managers can come from a host of industries, from FMCG to Financial Services, bringing new ideas and scheduling skills. Candidates may need a little retraining but gain their loyalty and that is but a small part to play for their induction.

> ***"Taking the easy route and recruiting from competitors does not fulfil growth demands…"***



***Matthew Jeffery** is the head of global talent at Electronic Arts*

GLOBETROTTING CANDIDATES

More and more candidates are happy to relocate nationally and internationally for the right job. I see this a lot – both from people applying to EA but also from existing staff who look for a new 'life changing' experience by working abroad.

Complex decisions are being taken by candidates on a daily basis not only involving working, but quality of life. 'Where can I work on great games, develop my career and bring my family up with a decent quality of life?'

Europe is blessed with some great programming talent in the former Eastern European communist states, which are becoming part of the EU. A lack of visa issues make this an easy and rich recruiting ground. How many UK companies are recruiting from there? Too few.

Mobility of candidates has a big effect on an industry and the well-known 'Brain Drain' is increasingly becoming a reality in the UK. It's a two-way street as talent in the UK and abroad recognise this change and see games developers investing in other countries with more attractive investment propositions. This could be Montreal or even one of the rapidly expanding countries in Asia.

UNIVERSITIES HOLD THE KEY

With the decrease in the availability of an experienced talent pool, building and maintaining solid graduate recruitment strategies is critical. In many ways graduates are the salvation to recruitment talent pool challenges. While it may seem obvious, this has not been recognised by enough games companies.

But there is more to graduate recruitment than attracting graduates via a jobs site web posting or receiving a CV from an agency. Graduates bring a huge desire for change and to prove their abilities. While experienced hires are schooled in particular eras or methodologies and can bring baggage which is difficult to retrain, graduates are used to learning. Training is like food for their brains. Their hunger also helps drive the internal promotion culture as others in the career chain feel the hunger of the grads chomping at their heels and hence raise their own game.

And setting up a graduate programme is not the preserve of the big publishers. It is not a matter of cost, but scale. An effective graduate scheme could involve selecting two or three universities to partner with, then providing advice, guest lecturers and then partnering with professors and getting to know the best students. It really does reap rewards for both parties – yet few do it.

INDUSTRY REPUTATION

As we look to diversify the talent pool we need to consider how we position ourselves as an industry. Video games are now mainstream entertainment and we need to ensure that the people who play our games today are more represented in our workforce. This applies particularly to the number of women and ethnic minorities. But when you look at any recent recruitment ads, most if not all still reflect the traditional geeky/nerdy image of the industry that is no longer representative.

ruitment Front Line

60 per cent of gamers playing The Sims are female and this is the biggest selling game of all time. But look at a games team and 60 per cent are not female. There are many reasons that there are not enough women working in games today but key is what we do moving forward. Pipelines show that, to make a real difference real change has to be engineered at both school and university level, to ensure that women feel encouraged about gaming as a career choice, they can progress in the industry and hold major positions. EA can point to a host of successful key leaders, including two label presents: Kathy Vrabeck, president of the Casual Entertainment label and Nancy Smith, president of The Sims label. Again working with bodies like Skillset, can hopefully start to educate at a younger age how good our industry is to work in.

A MORE FLEXIBLE WAY OF WORKING

A flexible workforce is also essential for future development and contractors hold the key. Game development scheduling is defined by peaks and troughs for different areas and there are times when not all of the team is acutely working on the game. How that part of the team can be kept motivated and financially utilised has always been a key question. Can certain areas of the team be best served by hiring in contractors for short periods of time than adding to the numbers of permanent recruits?

Outsourcing provides another alternative and while this topic is often met with fear, it is proven not to lead to job losses. In fact, in areas that have been outsourced, team members who would previously have completed the lower end work have been liberated to work on more creative areas and add more value to a game, which is a win all round. The key is that outsourcing can allow game teams to remain smaller and more cohesive.

NEW WAYS OF SPOTTING TALENT

Recruiters in 2008 have many ways to search for talent. Social Networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn give recruiters powerful tools to search for candidates and allow for a shop window into that person's life. Candidates should therefore be aware of what they share on those sites, as inappropriate material is likely to be seen and may not benefit their job applications.

Other trends such as user created content or advancements in technology such as Microsoft XNA will also help make aspiring game designer's work more visible and I wouldn't be surprised to see more recruiters pouring over content created by gamers to spot the next generation of talent.

IN-HOUSE RECRUITMENT

When I started in EA's UK studio, recruitment agencies were critical for pipeline, with over 70 per cent of positions filled through agency candidates. I always advise that proactive recruitment is the best way of recruiting staff. Recruiting by agencies and recruitment advertising is equivalent to a lottery. You just hope the best candidates are on the books at that moment in time or see the recruitment ad. That leaves a lot to chance.

The best recruiters for your company are still your staff. An effective internal referrals scheme coupled with a great working environment should mean your pipeline is never dry. In an age of web 2.0 with great social networking recruitment agencies in the games sector should no longer make placements with games professionals but by bringing to us talent from other industries that we cannot naturally find or attract. Now there's a winning business proposition.

If you are looking for a job, the clearest advice I can give is to go direct. If you want to work for EA, Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo etc., all have great jobs sites and recruiters to contact. Get to know them, meet them at Conferences such as the Develop Conference in Brighton – in short, control and influence your own career. It takes more time but is far more rewarding than hoping an agency wins through for you. Incidentally, agency recruitment at the EA UK Studio now makes up a very small percentage.

My advice to games companies, on any metric, be it cost, candidate experience, brand exposure, is ensure that you have an in-house recruitment team, loyally providing candidates with a great experience. Part of their focus needs to be on re-recruiting your own staff each day. Ensuring staff are happy and loved prevents recruiting for replacements.

SALARY MATURITY

With the decline in the size of the experienced talent pool and the growth in demand for staffing, candidates are increasingly in a position where they can negotiate stronger compensation packages. However, I would warn that as an industry we have to maintain a sensible position on this and avoid wages reaching unsustainable heights, while still appropriately honouring a candidate's level of experience, talent and skill.

HEADHUNTERS ARE YOUR FRIEND

I've read in *Develop* or on Developmag.com a company head or HR leader decrying the practice of headhunting. One head of studio event recently told me he was proud that no one had attempted to headhunt his staff. I had to point out that this should be a real danger sign to him about the quality of his staff.

If you are being targeted by head-hunters take pride in the fact it shows you have recruited the best talent. Headhunting is a common and accepted practice in the traditional blue chip industries; let's take pride in the fact that gaming has reached that maturity.

So are you a natural prey for head-hunters?

If you answer 'no' to any of the following then you are:

- Are your staff challenged?
- Are they well remunerated?
- Do they have a good work/life balance?
- Are they working on world class games?
- Do they have an opportunity for promotion?
- Are they receiving training & development?
- Are their ideas listened to?

If the answer is 'no', then start recruiting now for replacements.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Key to retaining staff is not necessarily money – that may be a short term motivator, but what makes people stick is being empowered and having real responsibility in a dynamic but friendly culture, backed by training and development.

A key exercise has recently been completed at EA whereby all the key job families have been mapped out (e.g. art, programming, audio, game design, production, project management etc.) and within that mapping, all roles and levels have been detailed so staff can transparently see what level of experience and responsibilities are needed to be promoted to the next level. That makes a key difference to staff forging their careers.

Also key has been recognising that a good manager makes all the difference to a person's day to day career and enjoyment at work. As we all know, just because a person is great at their craft does not necessarily make them a great manager of people. So, at EA we made the project managers, (or development directors as we call them), responsible for people and career development as well as scheduling. That was a huge step forward for us and enriches career development and performance feedback.

LOTS OF IDEAS…

…so little time to implement them. I hope this advice will help you either recruiting new talent or find a job in this amazing industry. Being a great recruiter may not be rocket science, but it is a fine art. There is no better industry in the world to work in; together we can help continue grow it.

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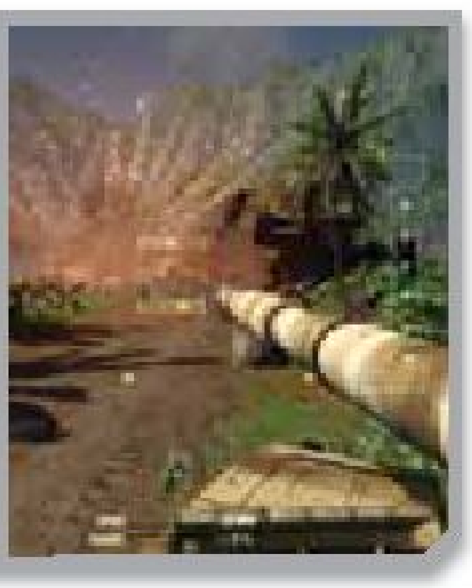

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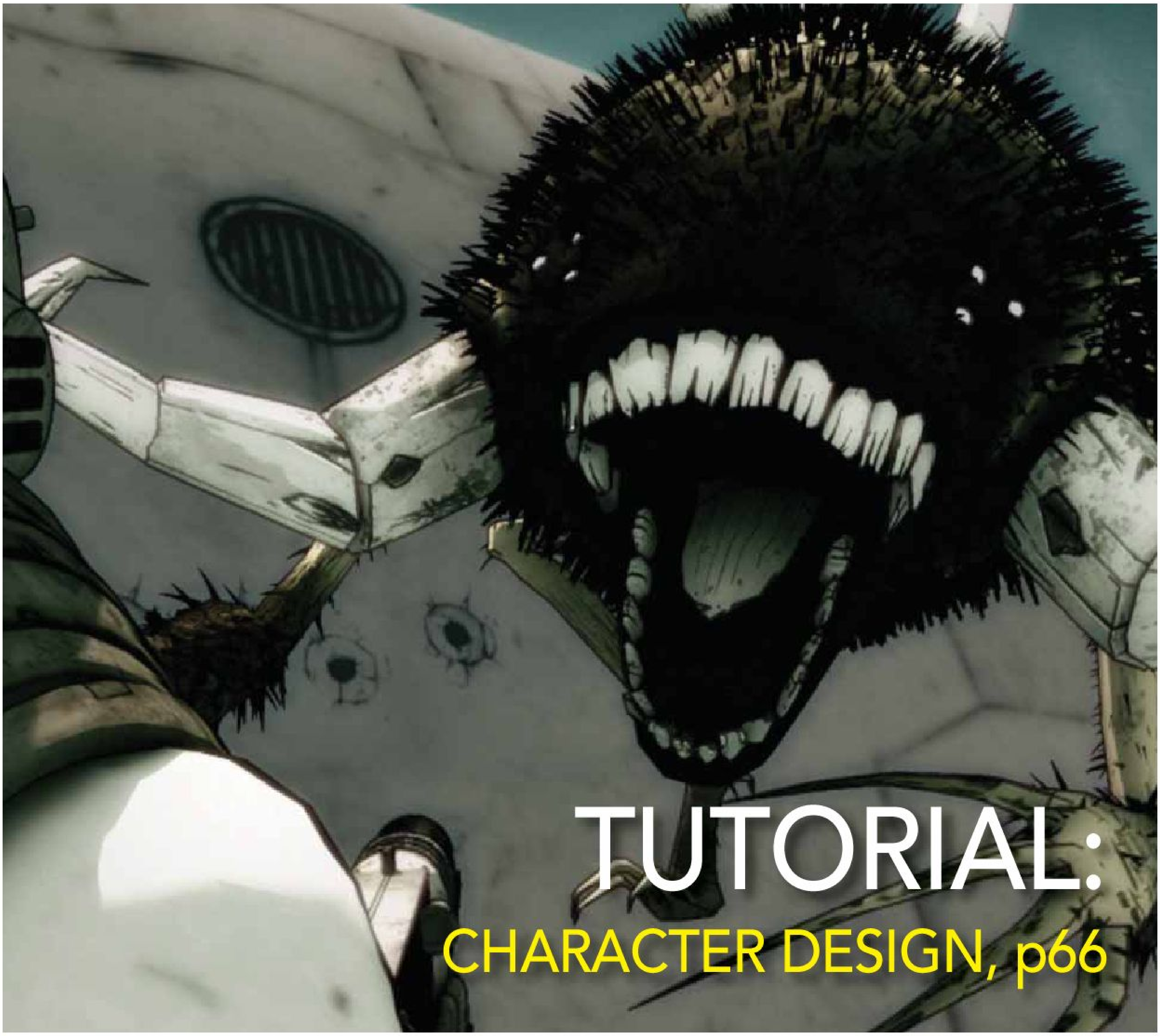

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Ain't what you use but the way you use it

YOU KNOW AGILE PROGRAMMING has made it big in the game's industry when the head of a studio making casual games gets all enthusiastic about the technique. Clearly appropriate when discussed in the terms of huge console titles and cutting edge shooters, somehow it seems less so in the case of EA Bright Light's quirky kids creature rhythm game Zubo. Of course, if anything, the likes of Scrum et al are much more useful in the context of an open ended development process compared to making A.N.Other shooter in a specific time/place setting. With casual games, even once you pinned down mechanics, characters, sub-missions etc, susceptibility to focus group feedback is always going to mean nimble iteration is the order of the day.

Still, it does make you think about the difference between how games should be made and the way the technology we use forces us to make them. As an example, the first industrial computers in the UK were the LEO machines produced by a spin-out from Lyons and Co of highstreet tea and cakes fame. Its early success occurred because it took the time to analyse how its customers worked, modifying the computer to suit and even 'shipping' its own experts along with the hardware. The dominance of IBM and Wintel since however has been due to their ability to create the corporate landscape that matches the cookiecutters they sell.

Indeed, one middleware company recently told me its biggest problem was overcoming its potential customers' entrenched views on the technology's novel workflow because it 'wasn't the way games should be made'. Maybe there are still some opportunities for agile thinking after all.

Jon Jordan
jon.jordan@intentmedia.co.uk

< CODING >

TORQUE GET TIGHTER

Flexibility and tools are the ongoing focus for GarageGames

IF YOU WANTED TO see an example of how broadly-based the market for game development tools has become over the past five years, you only need to consider GarageGames. Formed from the ashes of Tribes-creator Dynamix, its Torque game engine is now available in a range of flavours from 2D drag-and-drop Torque Game Builder options for Microsoft's XNA, and PC and Mac, through versions for commercial development of Wii and Xbox 360 titles. And, of course, there's the InstantAction plug-in which enables Torque content to be piped over to the company's growing online web portal.

As its name suggests however Torque Game Engine Advanced is the company's flagship product. The v1.7 release follows the longterm trend to improve project portability while adding new components and tools. Indeed, so much code has been refactored that project lead Matt Fairfax claims the performance of some benchmarks has more than doubled. The new release introduces the MegaTerrains system which can handle 64 square. km plus areas and comes with real-time editor support. There's a new abstracted sound system too.

But veep of business development Brett Seyler says GarageGames' attitude isn't the same as some of the other engine companies. "We take a very different approach I think than Epic, Emergent, Crytek and the 'big guys' in the industry. With Torque, we're aiming to provide the best game development technology for the kind of games we like to make. Those games are usually smaller, tighter in scope with a fun, action play mechanic and impressive visuals," he comments.

Still, GarageGames' developers aren't so aloof that they won't ignore inspiration from others. "We were inspired by some of the nicer tools CryEngine provides," Seyler says.

The other main area of work will see the Torque engine being complete restructured to make it more flexible. "The consensus of the game industry is that components are better than class heirarchies. It's a big change to make in an engine, but we're doing it," Selyer reveals. "Native Torque will be fully componentised in short time. Torque X [the XNA technology] already is. Moving to components will also allow us to create different tools in different ways."

www.garagegames.com

Torque Game Engine Advanced v1.7

Price: $295 indie seat, $1,495 commercial seat
Company: GarageGames
Contact: +01 541 345 3040

SwiftShader v2

Price: Available on request
Company: TransGaming
Contact: +01 416 979 9900
www.transgaming.com

An interesting product from a company previously best known for its Windows, Linux, Mac emulation technology, TransGaming has released SwiftShader v2, an updated version of its software 3D rendering system. It's been designed with two goals in mind; to provide a fall-back option without any source code changes for high-end games on platforms without 3D hardware; and experimentation in terms of the new multicore CPUs now available. New features in this release see improved support for DirectX 9, including Shader Model 2.0 and floating point rendering, and a significant increase in multicore performance.

MegaTerrain v1.1

Price: Available on request
Company: Zulus&Fly
Contact: sales@megaterrain.com
www.megaterrain.com

Real-time DirectX landscape rendering technology MegaTerrain has received its first point release, with the new version including DX 9 support and libraries, DLLs and project files for Microsoft Visual Studio 2005. The engine, which supports 65536 x 65536 pixel clipmaps operates with its terrain data streaming and decompression handled in separate threads. Terrains can be deformed in real-time and the subsequent collision meshes passed to your physics engine. And there's plenty more to come with grass rendering due in v1.2, and a lighting system and water rendering due in v1.3. Support for Xbox 360 and OpenGL is also expected.

< ART >

MODO'S IN THE MOOD

The biggest ever free upgrade means there's plenty in modo 302

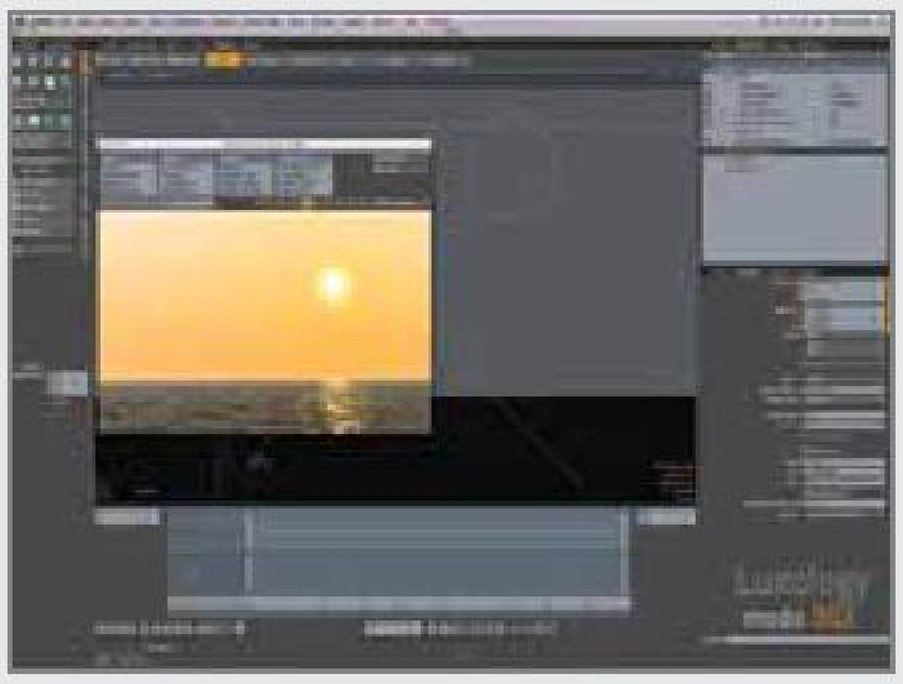
DESPITE BEING CALLED AN 'artist-driven upgrade that's focused on workflow not features', the fact president Brad Peebler proudly calls modo 302 the company's biggest ever service release underlines that it contains a lot of new things. One significant example is the simultaneous release of the modo File I/O software development kit, which allows you to import or export data directly from modo via the plug-in API. It's all part of what Peebler says is modo's 'platform status' within best-of-breed pipelines.

There's plenty on offer for artists too though, with Peebler happy to highlight modo's animation features. "We played it down initially," he says. "But the new Track View editor provides an intuitive interface that enables you to manage all your animation within modo."

As well as animation, modo also handles modelling, sculpting, painting and rendering and each has been enhanced. The Flex modelling tools provide an efficient way to select and pose meshes, while a new soft sculpting brush improves stroke interpolation. Time of day rendering has been made more realistic thanks to the Physical Sun and Physical Sky rendering simulation. This can be used in terms of baking textures, while, in addition, Photoshop file support mean you can use layered PSD files to automatically create texture layers in modo's Shader Tree.

www.luxology.com

modo 302



Price: free from 301, $895 new
Company: Luxology
Contact: +01 650 378 8506

Face Robot v1.9

Price: Available on request
Company: Softimage
Contact: +01 514 845 1636
www.softimage.com

Despite a rather bumpy launch, which was overshadow by the $100,000 price tag, Softimage's Face Robot facial representation software has slowly been finding its place in the world. Of course, pricing has been one area fully overhauled with more scalable options now in place, but the technology is changing too. New in this point release is an export system which enables you to move completed facial rigs and animation data directly into Maya. Such pipelineability is crucial in terms allowing outsourcers who are using Face Robot to quickly provide clients with high quality and stable assets.

DAZ Studio 2.1

Price: free
Company: DAZ 3D
Contact: +01 801 495 1777
www.daz3d.com

The free stuff just got better as DAZ 3D has brushed up its 3D art creation package DAZ Studio. New in the point release are support for the 3Delight Render Engine, which is compliant with Renderman, as well as fast rendering, which takes advantage of your graphics card to speed the display of shaded geometry. Other graphical tweaks include level of detail and sub divisional geometry features to control the density and resolution of character meshes. Also improving the quality of character is Auto Magnetize, which stops body parts poking through clothes. Finally, there's a QuickStart Interface to get you working faster.

< AUDIO >

LOOPY ABOUT WII

Make sweet music with your Wiimote and the LoopMachine

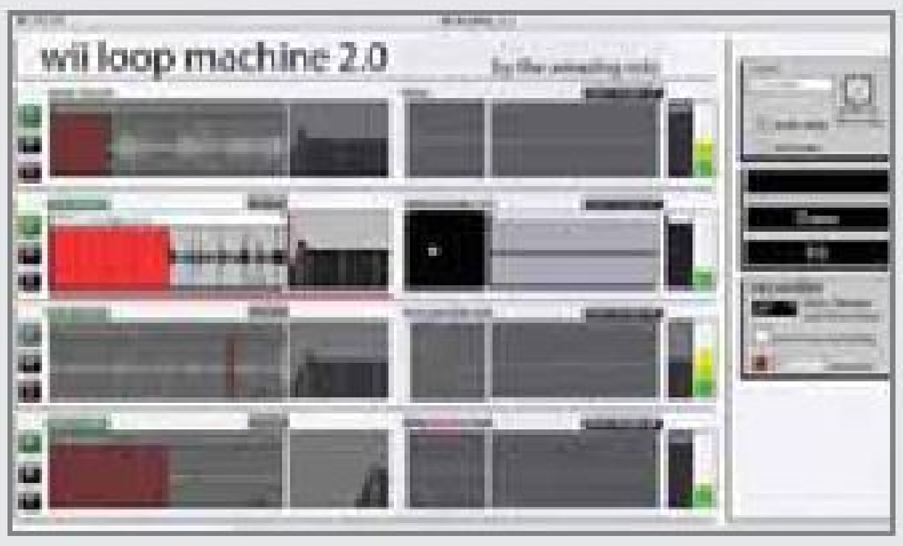
WE ALL KNOW THE Wii has revolutionised the way people expect to interact with games, and it seems its infectious charms are working in other areas of human-machine interface too. Welcome to LoopMachine v2.0. The creation of The Amazing Rolo (aka Yann Seznec), via his project in the University of Edinburgh EPIS business incubation scheme, it's a piece of software that enables you to make music using the movements of a Wiimote controller.

A complete rewrite compared to version 1.0 of the software, Seznec compares it to a simple version of the professional Ableton Live music sequencer as LoopMachine is a loop-based, performance-oriented package. Also like Live, at present it only runs on Mac OS X (10.4 or 10.5 suggested), although a Windows version of the software is planned for a summer release.

It works using a Bluetooth connection with the Wiimote, enabling you to simultaneously loop, mix, sample, manipulate and compose with up to four audio channels. Three effects (multi-tap delay, granulation and modulation), plus a filter can be applied to each track using the movements of the controller and button presses to cycle through the different effects and tracks. Other related packages include the Maniipulator, which enables you to manipulate live sound, and Siimple Synth, both of which you can use in conjunction with the LoopMachine by using two Wiimotes at the same time.

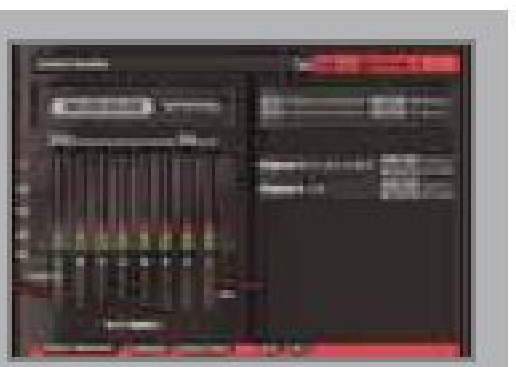
www.theamazingrolo.net/wii/?page_id=15

LoopMachine v2.0



Price: $20
Company: Yann Seznec (The Amazing Rolo)
Contact: rolo@theamazingrolo.net

SurCode for Dolby E



Price: $3,195
Company: Minnetonka Audio
Contact: info@minnetonkaaudio.com
www.minnetonkaaudio.com

Everything's gone very Dolby E at Minnetonka Audio, which has added support for the studio technology cum standard exchange format, which enables you to compress 8 channels of audio into a digital stream that can be stored on standard stereo tracks. Support for Dolby E has been added to the company's SurCode, and is available for both Pro Tools and Minnetonka AudioTools AWE. A Dolby Media Meter plug-in has also been added for AudioTools AWE to improve the consistency of audio. It includes the Dialogue Intelligence algorithm for measuring the subjective loudness of speech

Peak LE 6

Price: $129
Company: BIAS
Contact: +1 707 782 1866
www.bias-inc.com

Following on from the release last month of its Mac-based editing and processing package Peak Pro, comes the prosumer version, Peak LE 6. Missing some of the series' more advanced mastering, restoration and sound design features, enhancements in Peal LE 6 have been made to areas such as podcasting and iTunes integration. These include an automatic voiceover ducking feature, mono-stereo conversion and more flexible playlists. Audio documents or playlists can also now be exported directly into iTunes, while the new user interface offers magnetic, snap-together windows. Peak LE 6 ships with a collection of audio plug-ins and utilities.

KEYRELEASE

PRODUCT: Perforce 2007.3 (2008.1, summer)
COMPANY: Perforce
PRICE: $800 per user ($900 from July 1st)
CONTACT: +44 845 345 0116
W: www.perforce.com

The 'Force remains strong

Jon Jordan finds that the bulletpoints for Perforce's eponymous version control software are robust, simple and reliable…

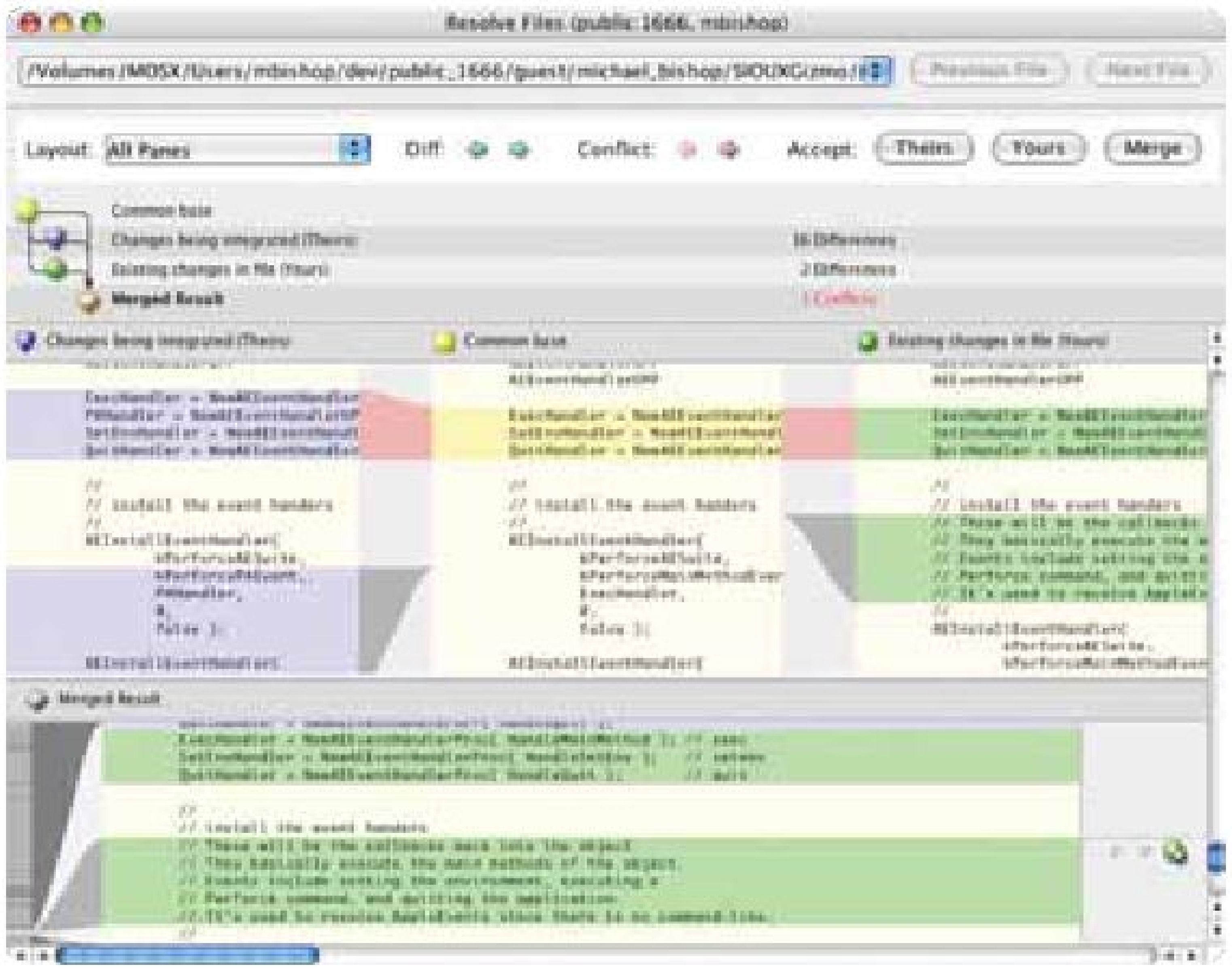
Sure, we eat our own dog food. We've been using Perforce to make Perforce ever since the system could check itself in. One of our servers has been in constant operation for over 10 years now, " says a proud Christopher Seiwald, founder, president and CTO of Perforce.

Granted, version control software, or a Software Configuration Management (SCM) system as labelled by Perforce, doesn't often generate headlines but few programmers would disagree it can have a big impact on their day-to-day work.

"It's a specialised tool that sits in a specialised place in the development process. You have your compiler, your editor and your SCM," Seiwald agrees. Perforce's role in that ecosystem over the past dozen years has been cemented by simple yet highly effective features; it's stable, doesn't get in the way, offers a flexible API, supports plenty of client operating systems and is sensibly priced.

At the core sits the Perforce Server that manages access to a central file repository and tracks activity as users access the database through a variety of visual, web-based and command line clients. A reporting system, defect tracking and merge tool are also available, although Perforce's business model means you buy the server and pay for the number of seats accessing it, so all related software is effectively free.

> ***"Our challenge is 'Who is not using Perforce?' – and 'Why not?'…"***
>
> ***Christopher Sewald, Perforce***



Seiwald says that despite the seeming temptation of branching out into other areas, he's happy to keep his focus on ensuring the things Perforce currently does well, it does even better in future.

"We've always been wary of cashing our success in one area for failure in another," he jokes. "We're pretty solid on what we know we can do, so our challenge is who's not using Perforce and why not?"

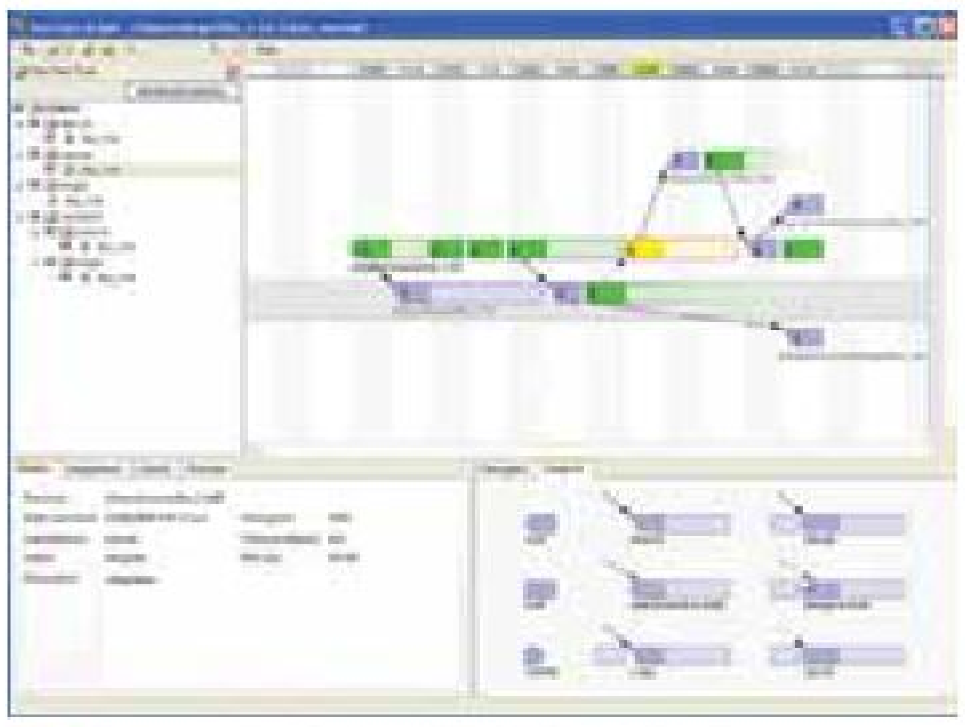
Aside from this, even if it wanted to branch out, Seiwald argues, there is a lack of obvious partners. "SCM has been around long enough that people are broadly in agreement about what works and what doesn't. That's not the case when it comes to build systems or testing systems, and there must be 50 defect trackers out there," he says.

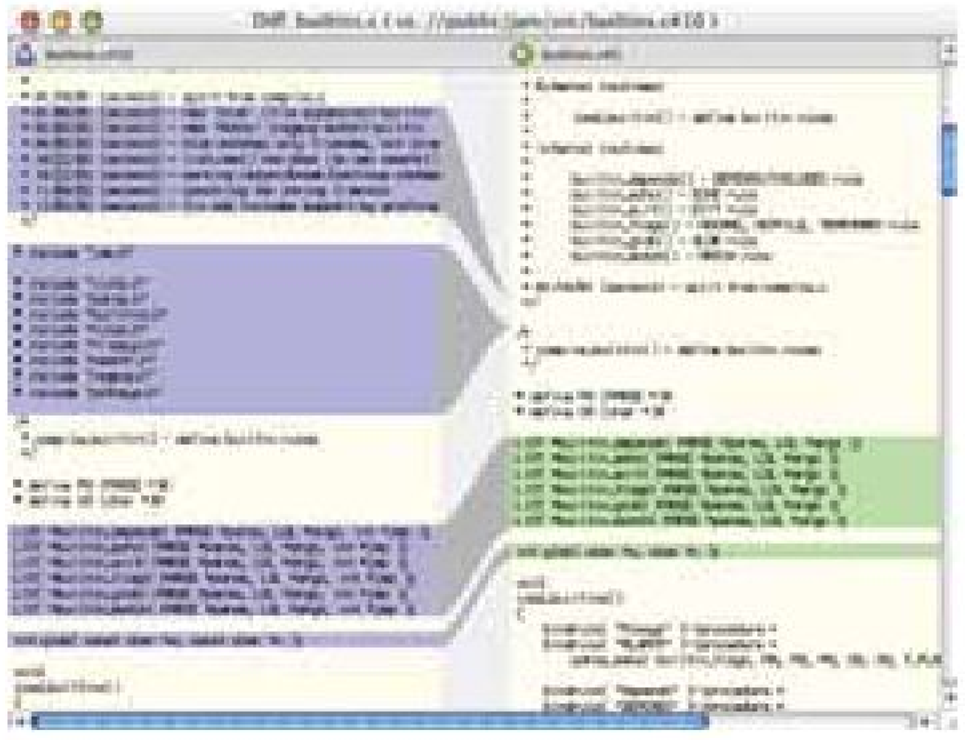
"We try to provide some integrations ourselves if we see there's enough feedback and sometimes we work with individual customers on a consultancy basis but by and large, customers do it for themselves. A lot of companies invest in infrastructure because that's what gives them competitive advantage so they're willing to put effort into making it work."

The games industry has had an effect on Perforce's direction however. Competition from the art-focused Alienbrain resulted in a thumbnail viewer so users could get a visual idea of what assets are stored on the server. The sheer size of games is also forcing basic requirements.

"We don't get into content any more than noticing the difference between binary and text files and if it's a binary file we rely on a tool to manage it," Seiwald says. "We now do integration with 3ds Max, Maya and XSI. Games pushed us in terms of what we need to support because there are a lot of file types but there are also very large files so some customers run up along the edge of what we can handle. It turns out that even with the fastest networking, if you've got to make a copy of 50 GB of data, it's going to take a certain amount of time to get across the wire."

So back to making sure whatever Perforce does well now, it does better in future, then.





Top: Christopher Seiwald, founder, president and CTO, Perforce **Middle:** The Revision Graph displays a file's branch history **Bottom:** Perforce's Visual Client provides quick access to versioned files

A simple plan

Part of Perforce's success, according to Christopher Seiwald, is the company's approach to licensing.

The evaluation licence is fully functional and supports two users and five client workspaces, while educational and open source licenses are available. Commercial licensing is transparent, too, with the first 20 users being charged at a rate of $800, dropping to $750 for the next 30 and so on to a flat rate of $500 per user for deals of more than 1,000 seats. After some years of stability, prices are set to rise on July 1st with a $900 opening price, dropping to $430 for more than 10,000 users however. Annual maintenance remains £160 per user.

"We occupy a unique niche in that we have a product that is used across some very large companies but is sold like individual software," Seiwald says. "Generally, if you're buying something for thousands of users, the price is heavily negotiated. Equally though, there's the saying that if you spend $25 on a piece of software and it doesn't work, you take it back. But if you buy a million dollar piece of software, you know you'll be spending a million in consulting to get it working. Our price reflects the fact that if you buy Perforce, it will work."

DEVELOPER OF THE AWARD-WINNING ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS

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Horsepower for

The headlines might be grabbed by the likes of Unreal 3 and Tech 5, but there are game engines available for all sorts of different projects…

When it comes to engines, the pendulum has definitely swung in favour of technologies developed by companies who also make games.

There are clear advantages, of course, in terms of having a battle-hardened system from a battle-hardened studio that's actually shipped a game. Yet compared to vendors such as Emergent and Qubesoft, who just do the technology, the Epics, Cryteks and ids of the world do have disadvantages to overcome too.

Historically all three have had a propensity for the PC; something that requires plenty of re-engineering in terms of providing similar features across Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, let alone Wii. Indeed, of our featured companies, only Emergent and Qubesoft support Nintendo's little box of fun. Other mundane issues such as support and documentation don't always sit well in terms of the game development mindset either.

Yet when it comes to any sort of engine, sheer horsepower generally wins out, and that seems to be the priority in terms of the big studio-wise deals publishers are signing up for.

But as the range of games being made continues to broaden – from casual and serious gaming on one hand to Triple-A and MMOs on the other – there should be plenty of business to go round.

EPIC

TECHNOLOGY
Unreal Engine 3

CLIENTS
Activision, BioWare, EA, Gearbox, Microsoft, NCsoft, RealTime Worlds, Sony, Take Two, THQ

PLATFORMS
PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

INTEGRATION WITH
Enlighten, GameSpy, Kynapse, morpheme, PhysX, ProFX, Rendez-Vous, Spark, SpeedTree

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
mrein@epicgames.com

Unreal 3 isn't just a FPS engine

www.unrealtechnology.com

Apparently there are some game developers and publishers who aren't yet using Unreal 3, but there can't be too many left out in the cold. Indeed, the cross-platform engine is become increasingly popular in other sectors including MMOs, architecture and pre-visualisation. Epic's Integrated Partners Program for other middleware companies to integrate into Unreal is also going from strength to strength with Scaleform and NaturalMotion recent adopters.

CRYTEK

TECHNOLOGY
CryENGINE 2

CLIENTS
Avatar Reality, Games Academy, MindArk, Paleo, Reloaded, WeMade

PLATFORMS
PC (Xbox 360 and PS3 in development)

INTEGRATION WITH
Alienbrain, CRI, FMOD, Perforce, and Scaleform, plus plug-ins for 3ds Max, Photoshop and XSI

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
business@crytek.de

Crysis was the first CryENGINE 2 game

www.cryengine2.com

Perhaps the most obvious competitor for Unreal, the CryENGINE 2 reputation as bleeding edge technology for shooters is based on Crytek's callingcard, PC game *Crysis*. The company points out the flexibility of systems such as the animation and physics means it can be used for most genres.

The quality of the forthcoming Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 versions will be the key to future success however.

EMERGENT

TECHNOLOGY
Gamebyro v2

CLIENTS
Bethesda, Blue Fang, EA Mythic, NCsoft, Sony, Take Two, The9

PLATFORMS
PC, PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360

INTEGRATION WITH
Anark, CRI, Kynapse, morpheme, Miles, PhysX, ProFX, Scaleform, Speedtree, Wwise, and plug-ins for 3ds Max and Maya

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
sales@emergent.net

Gamebryo 2.5 is due this summer

www.emergent.net

It's full speed ahead at Emergent where the focus is on Gamebryo 2.5, which is due to ship this summer.

New features include a terrain system, which consists of a runtime component and editor, a re-architected geometry pipeline and integrated GPU instancing.

The Floodgate stream processing engine will also be fully integrated with the core engine via the new mesh modifier system.

courses

ID

TECHNOLOGY
idTech 5

CLIENTS
TBA

PLATFORMS
Mac, PC, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360

INTEGRATION WITH
Alienbrain, DevTrack, plus plug-ins for 3ds Max, LightWave 3D and Maya

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
licensing@idsoftware.com

Tech 5 is id's fifth engine

www.idsoftware.com/business

With no announced clients or in-development titles, except id's Rage, not too much is known about idTech 5. One much discussed feature however is the MegaTexture system, a streaming technology which treats environments as one very large texture rather than small tiled components. Another talked-up feature is the collision system which id claims prevents the geometric interpenetrations and collision errors typically seen in games.

QUBESOFT

TECHNOLOGY
Q 2.0

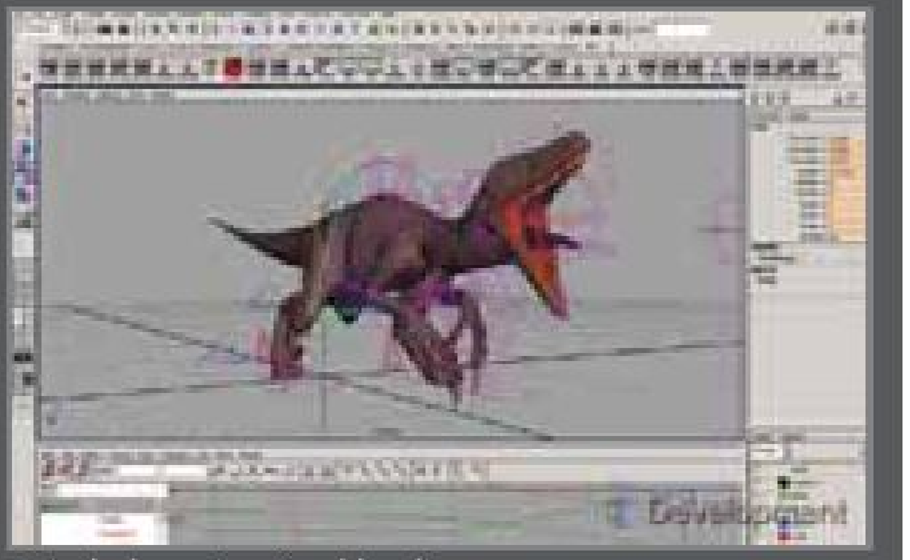
CLIENT
TBA

HOST PLATFORMS
Linux, Mac, PC, PlayStation 3, Wii

INTEGRATION WITH
Visual Studio 2008

PRICE
Available on request

CONTACT
info@qubesoft.com



Q includes animation blending

www.qubesoft.com

A lightweight cross-platform plug-in framework, Q is designed to enable you use the provided components or customise and add new ones appropriate to the game or application you're making.

Data streaming, arbitrary scene rendering, n-dimensional animation blending and a real-time 3D editor are just some of the out-of-the-box features. You'll have to add your own physics and AI, though.

Deferred Shading

by David Jefferies

Black Rock Studio

IF YOU'VE EVER DONE any shader programming then at some time you've probably experienced a niggling doubt about how tightly coupled the geometry is with the lighting.

My first experience of HLSL programming was with an Xbox and I wrote a shader for doing soft-skinning. Well, actually I wrote five shaders, one for no lights, one for one light and so on up to four lights. To any software engineer that kind of cut and paste duplication is just wrong.

Deferred shading, on the other hand, feels right. The geometry and the lighting aren't bound together at all. You render the geometry in the scene without doing any lighting. This makes for great batching with fewer draw calls and state changes. As each pixel gets written into the colour buffer you need to render the information needed for lighting into another, off-screen, render target (called a x-buffer). This information comprises normals, motion blur vectors, specularity, reflectivity etc.

Then, after all the geometry has been rendered, you render a series of screen-space shapes representing each light and, using the info from the g-buffer, perform the lighting calculations. For the sun, for instance, you might want to render a full-screen quad but for a street light it might be a small cone that represents the light-volume. Each visible pixel gets shaded exactly once.

You can also use the depth buffer that has been laid down for all sorts of interesting effects from soft particles to screen space ambient occlusion.

There are a couple of flies in the ointment. Firstly the g-buffer means that there's no way of storing alpha so that has to be rendered using a traditional renderer, and hardware anti-aliasing isn't supported so you'll need to anti-alias the scene yourself.

We started off down the route of the deferred renderer a few years ago and one of my colleagues, Shawn Hargreaves, did a presentation at GDC (Hargreaves 2004), but we abandoned the plans after getting the Xbox 360 specs and seeing the 10Mb EDRAM limit. Not a great thing to have if you're planning on writing a 12Mb g-buffer!

Now, though, we're resurrecting the deferred renderer partly because our game demands more lights and partly because we require the z-buffer for our lighting effects, but also because the PlayStation 3 seems better suited to the technique – it has no EDRAM for one thing, and is happier with the simpler vertex formats that deferred shading gives you. On the Xbox360 we're just taking the hit of the additional resolves required from EDRAM.

Interestingly, at GDC both Microsoft and ATI said the technique was going to become dominant in the future, so an investment made upfront now seems likely to pay off in the long run.

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OPINION

by Dave Robertson

Decoding the Future

Today's software developers need to design infrastructures that will support a challenging, volatile future, says Dave Robertson, director of European operations at Perforce Software…

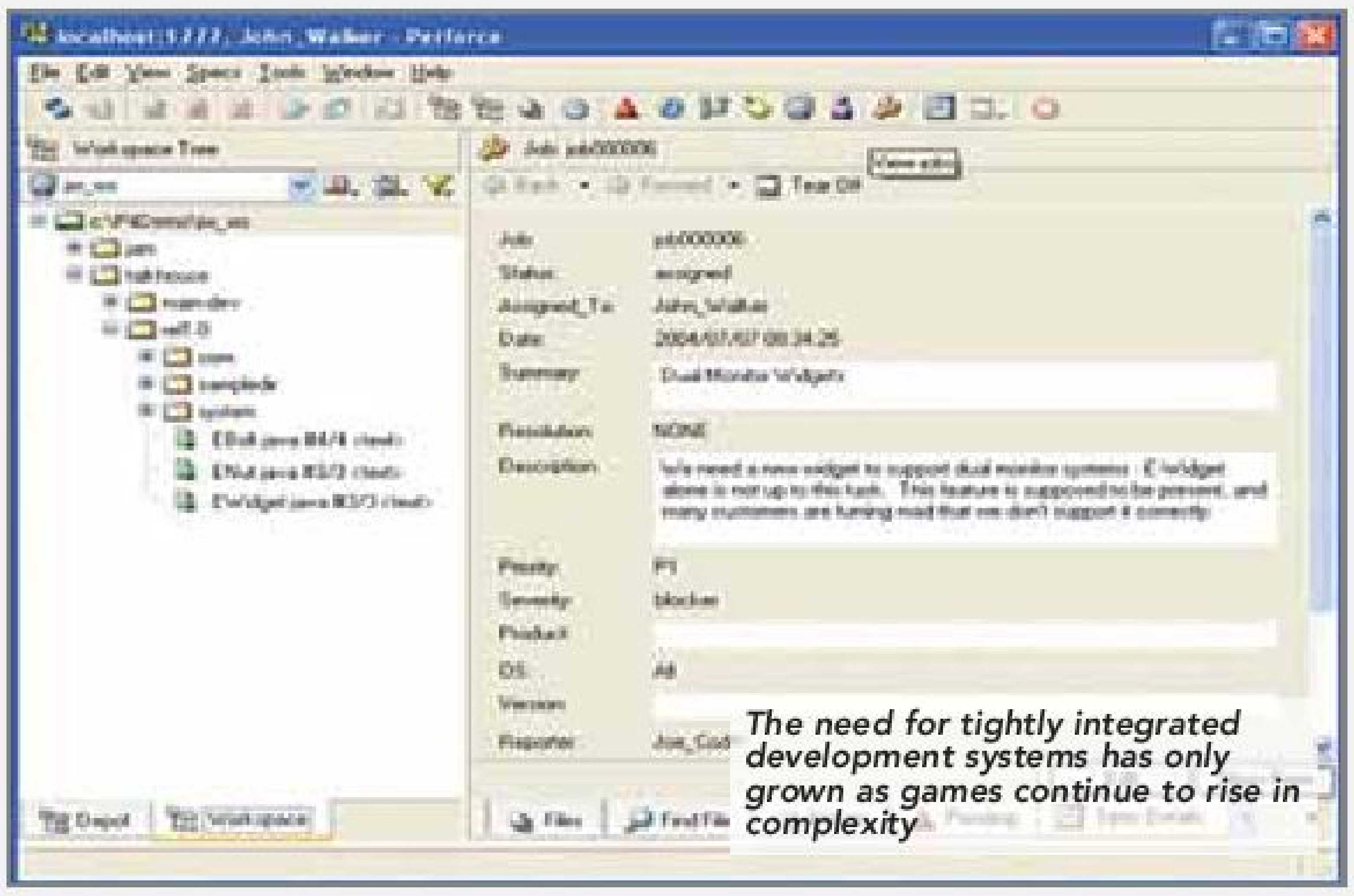
Life is never easy for hard-working game developers – many of whom face same challenges. Namely, as games have become increasingly complex, the sophistication needed to manage assets has increased dramatically.

Take source code for example. The amount of code testing and modification necessary for the average game has increased dramatically as the codebase has ballooned, and managing that complex process can present teams with a significant problem. Add the management of the other digital assets in a game, such as video, audio and 3D graphics files, and games companies that don't get this under control risk devoting a significant portion of their resource to administrative issues.

An effective management system is therefore vital to a games developer trying to bring all of these assets together in a cohesive way. The challenge has become harder since the industry realised titles could be developed more effectively using specialist houses to concentrate on particular areas.

SUSTAINING GROWTH

Deploying such tools isn't simply a way to make life easier for employees. It could help to solve one of the biggest business challenges facing development houses in the next few years: sustaining growth. According to last summer's Global Entertainment and Media Outlook report from PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the industry will enjoy a global average compound annual growth rate of 9.1 per cent in revenue terms between 2007 and 2011. That growth curve is far from linear. Instead, it will slow considerably throughout that period. Global growth of 18.5 per cent last year will plummet to 10.6 per cent this year, and will hit just 6.7 per cent in 2009. Developers must find other ways to maintain the level of success that the industry wants, and the obvious answer is to increase profits by driving efficiency.



The need for tightly integrated development systems has only grown as games continue to rise in complexity

Other environmental factors peculiar to the games industry bring their own challenges. For example, the symbiosis between games development and the film industry imposes particular constraints that can harden timelines.

In the early days of development, games stood alone in the market, and setbacks in development schedules had a limited effect. A game that was late by a month might have meant lost revenue for a publisher, but the effects stopped there. Now, high-revenue games are likely to be developed as tie-ins for movies. If a summer blockbuster hits the box office and the corresponding computer game isn't ready, the business implications could be significant. Proficiency in managing digital assets and the associated workflow around them can help games developers and their partners to hit their deadlines.

MULTIPLE PLATFORMS

Short-term deadlines aren't the only challenges to consider during games development. The proliferation of new platforms creates longer-term challenges that require developers to build as much flexibility as possible into their systems.

Mobile platforms are a good example. They have given new life to game titles that previously languished in the catalogue. Who would have thought in the mid-eighties that people would one day be playing Commodore 64 games on a mobile phone? Similarly, it is hard for today's games developers to imagine where their digital assets may end up, and for what platforms they may need to be repurposed.

When Nokia moved to acquire Norwegian open source software toolkit company Trolltech in late January, the industry immediately understood the potential for the deployment of the Linux platform on mobile consumer devices. To what extent will games developers be ready for such developments in the future? In such situations, there is a direct correlation between agility in software configuration management, and time to market. Proficiency at managing and manipulating intellectual property will have a direct effect on revenues.

Some studios have already understood this need, and looked for areas in which the greatest improvements can be made. Matching not just the source code, but other digital assets vital to the production of a video game has been one of the toughest challenges for video game developers in the past, and all signs indicate that this is only going to get more difficult in the future as games become more sophisticated.

DISTRIBUTED DEVELOPMENT

The increasingly distributed nature of games development that studios are encountering means developers no longer have total control over the platforms used to create blockbuster titles. Schisms may emerge as different teams use preferred tools to modify or create assets.

The greatest problem in distributed development environments arises when developers try to manage the workflow between these far-flung remote members of the game's development team. Digital assets such as wireframe animations, sound files and code segments must be checked in and out and properly version controlled, so that everyone in the team understands the changes that have been made, who is responsible for the asset, and how it fits together with other assets in the system.

MORE THAN A ONE TRICK PONY

This means that not only must a truly flexible software configuration management system manage more than just lines of code, but it must be able to support links to other products used in the development lifecycle. This may not necessarily mean that interfaces are bundled with the software out of the box -- the number of platforms used by different production houses may be too diverse to be covered by a single product. Rather, the SCM system should have the flexibility to interface to any tool for which the software development team can write its own plug-in. That requires an extensible system with a rich set of APIs, so that development teams can configure it to suit their own needs.

For the industry in general, that future is likely to see talent being sourced increasingly from regions such as Romania and Russia, where talent is high, and human resource costs are relatively low. In that context, the need for tight integration of distributed, heterogeneous development systems will only grow.

Developers may be more innovative than ever when it comes to crafting algorithms, but coding is no longer enough. Getting the right technical infrastructure in place now to prepare for a volatile business environment tomorrow could be the smartest technical move that they'll ever make.

Dave Robertson is director of European operations at Perforce Software
www.perforce.com

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Building a virtual office

TechExcel's **Alex Potier** looks at things to keep in mind when managing distributed game development teams…

< CODING >

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The ecosystem for game development is, as ever, in a dramatic state of growth and change. With technologies like XNA and Steam lowering the bar of entry and the emergence of vibrant social networks, it is possible to build a successful title with a fully distributed team. The distributed model provides many benefits. For example, artists in Germany can collaborate with programmers in China who can interact with production teams in the UK. This can lower the costs of a project significantly together with the benefits of utilising best of breed skills.

Bu this model also poses new challenges. The biggest of these is communication and management control. Managing a distributed team means making sure everyone is productive and meeting deliverables over a 24 hour period. When someone is in the same building, it is easy to get a status update. When your team is in multiple locations, across many time zones, getting a simple update can be a painful experience. It is up to the manager of the distributed efforts to coordinate activities and effortlessly see the current status of the project. This is the first communication problem to solve. Tools can be put into place to build a virtual office: a centralised point of communication for the entire team and this is one of the conundrums that TechExcel's DevSuite is seeking to solve.

> ***"The distributed model poses new challenges. The biggest is communication and management control…"***

BUILDING A VIRTUAL OFFICE

The key to communicating ideas across distributed teams is providing a common space for the team members to interact. This can be through a knowledge system, a wiki, or an integrated game lifecycle toolset. Within the virtual office, you need a way to highlight the work to be done and gain visibility into the work that is complete or in progress.

The task tracking system is the heart of a virtual office. It should allow for a producer to communicate their deadlines while allowing leads to manage the day to day tasks and work breakdown of the title. The task tracking system is the core of the virtual office – global studios such as EA Games and SCE already have them in place.

Also, the task tracking system must keep everyone working towards the same goals while not being a hindrance to productivity. Tight integration with other tool sets (from graphics applications to source code libraries) means that the team can do their work with minimal interruptions. Workflow from the task tracking system ensures that processes are followed. Messaging and reporting make sure items don't fall through the cracks.

BRIDGING CULTURAL GAPS

It is also important to bridge cultural gaps in your virtual office. Not everyone will understand a word in the same way – different regions and teams might interpret words and symbols in their own way. For this reason, communication in the virtual office is augmented by clear diagrams, images, requirements and specifications.

This requires additional functionality in the task management system. Artists should be able to see the concept art that is inspiring their work items. Developers need to understand how a certain piece of code will need to work in order to meet the designer's goals. Producers need to understand the impact that a change to certain functionality will have on the rest of the project. But, overall, be clear about what it trying to be achieved.

TYING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you have task tracking and clear visibility in requirements governing those tasks, the team can work independently on their respective areas. Since the task tracking system communicates deadlines as tasks are completed, they can go through a test plan. Because the requirements are clearly defined, testing is the process of verifying that what was delivered matches what was designed.

Alex Potier is TechExcel's business manager for EMEA game markets. TechExcel recently released DevSuite 7.0. apotier@techexcel.com

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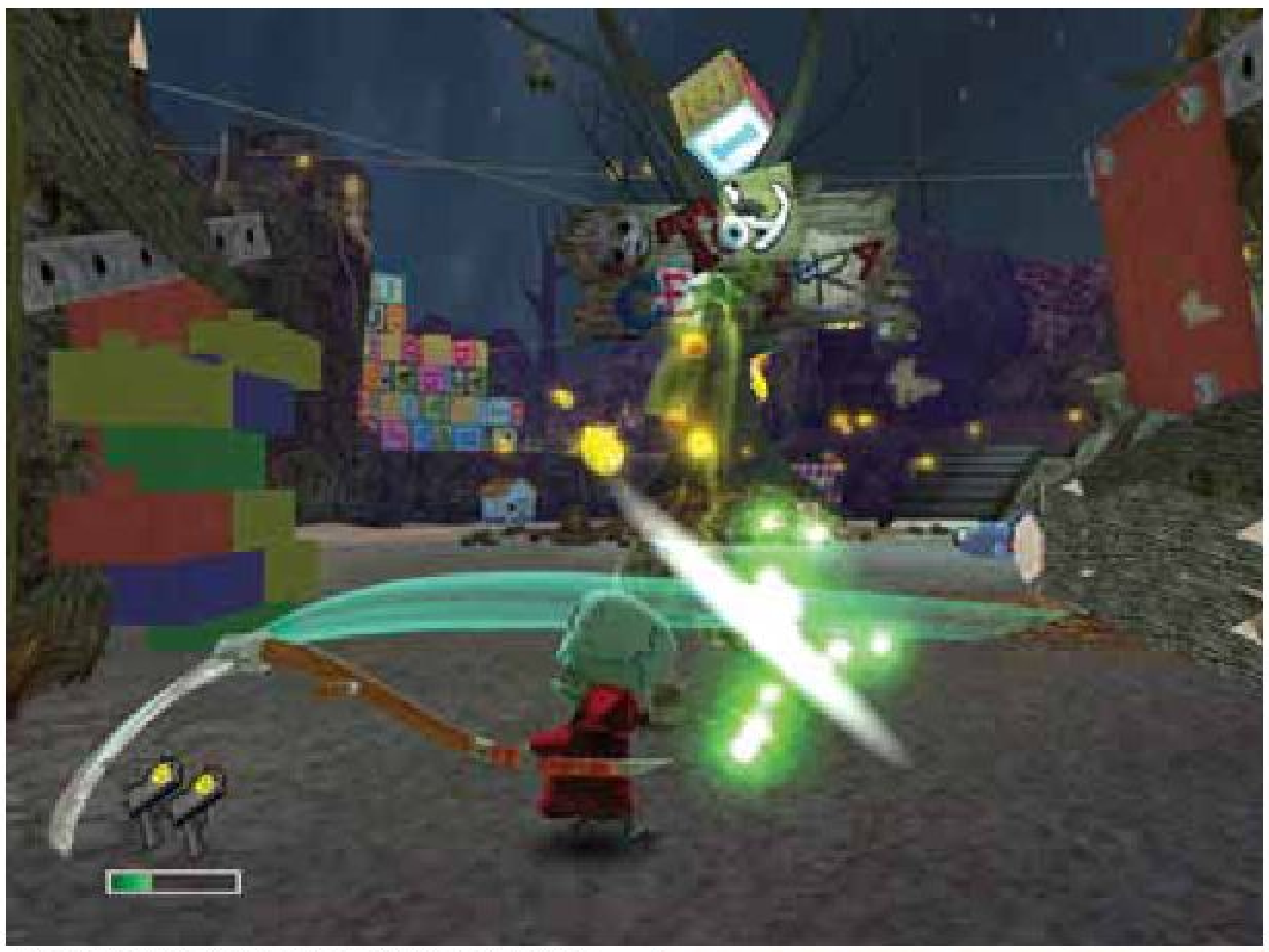
HEARDABOUT

Death Jr. 2: Root of Evil

John Broomhall talks to Backbone's lead sound designer, Yannis Brown…



The audio for Death Jr. on Wii benefits from the platform's flexible memory sharing says Brown (pictured right)

The migration of *Death Jr: Root of Evil* from PSP to Wii handed Backbone's lead sound designer Yannis Brown a blank canvas.

A tongue-in-cheek hack'n'slash-come-FPS, the game is strong on humour, featuring an array of truly wacky environments as Brown explains: "Imagine a toy cemetery where dead toys come back to life and crawl from the graves – the game is an outsize funhouse complete with massive pinball machine, giant kitchen, sewers and subterranian caverns. It's rich pickings for a sound designer. By the way, Death Jr. is the son of the Grim Reaper trying to rescue his father from the clutches of a dastardly fairy who has imbibed an elixir which makes her uber-fiendishly evil. So as you can imagine, there are some hilarious moments in the dialogue.

"What was exciting for me was the opportunity to completely revise the original sound design to exploit the capabilities of Wii. My first priority working with the technical team was to ensure we had the requisite audio engine features in place and designing 'real-time' implementation tools to produce an efficient, audio-friendly workflow."

Taking time out for tools creation, even within a relatively short development window, was the master-stroke as far as Brown is concerned, enabling him to realise the full potential of the situation confronting him. "I enjoyed this amazing luxury of having the finished levels from the PSP version to work with. However, a lack of implementation control – say, having to work vicariously through programmers – would have been disastrous given a relatively tight schedule.

"Playing through the levels 'silently' was creatively inspiring and I instinctively knew the sounds I wanted to create and try in situ – what would make the environments feel alive. I was able to play every inch of the game whilst incrementally adding sound and doing a rough balance en route – no re-booting – I could re-load a sound bank, tweak parameters and carry straight on auditioning the game. It was a brilliant process, which got my creative juices flowing (I even had the music to work with). Obviously, it's not always possible to work this way but it's certainly made me think carefully about how I want to approach future titles – perhaps leaving some aspects of the final sound design work until much later than I might have done previously. Whilst it's useful to work with video of game footage or even screenshots, being able to explore every nook and cranny is tons better – it's surprising what ideas come to you poking around the back of the giant refridgerator in the giant kitchen."

According to Brown, enjoying the privileged exact opposite of 'working blind', as many sound FX creators still do, has direct consequences on quality. He says: "There's a real sense of the sounds fitting with the visuals – really belonging to them – not surprising as I'd been able to experiment so freely. Another result is much better detailing of sound and there's also much more variety."

> **"You absolutely have to do your own audio QA. I hammered the game for ten to 14 hours a day during crunch…"**

Brown's personal commitment also clearly came into play too, as he explains: "You absolutely have to do your own audio QA. As well as a solid two weeks adjusting the mix, I hammered the game for 10 to 14 hours a day during 'crunch', picking up any changes/adds that had gone under my radar and addressing them swiftly. I listenened on a variety of speaker systems from small TV to full 5.1.

"I've learned a lot from the experience. It was great working on the Wii, a powerful platform, which also proved flexible – for instance being able to share memory intelligently with a 'give and take' approach where the ratio could be pushed in favour of audio for specific instances where it deserved precedence. But most of all it's so important to have the sound people involved in the technical design of the tools, and getting those tools right will save literally months of development time. It will definitely yield better sound – so invest time for tools on your project."

FORMATS: Wii
DEVELOPER: Backbone Entertainment - Emeryville
PUBLISHER: Eidos x
THE AUDIO TEAM:
Audio Director: Robert Baffy
Lead Sound Designer: Yannis Brown
Additional Audio: Jared Emerson-Johnson, Anna Karney, Julian Kwasneski, Kurt Harland, Jeff Wessman
Original Music: Robert Baffy, Kurt Harland;
Audio programming: David Aldridge
Dialogue Direction Wii: James Stanley
Original Dialogue Direction PSP: James Stanley, Micah Russo, Ardry Englehart, Chris Odophal
Voice Talent: Amy Provenzano, Andrew Chaikin, Brett Pels, Brian Sommer, Casey Robertson, Daron Jennings, Melissa Hutchinson, Paige Perez
Casting & Recording & Post Production: WebTone
Audio intern: Kentaro Fischer

John Broomhall is an independent audio director, consultant and content provider
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Intel and Epic launch the '$1million Intel Make Something Unreal Contest'

Epic has teamed up with Intel to launch the '$1 Million Intel Make Something Unreal Contest'.

This is a great way for aspiring game makers and mod teams to hone development skills, gain recognition and possibly even land a job.

Many Epic employees have been recruited directly from the mod community. We always have openings, and this is a great way to get noticed.

Winnings include cash awards, high-end PCs and, for the grand prize winner, an Unreal Engine 3 license in recognition of *Unreal Tournament 3* mods that stand out in a range of categories, including level design, graphics, physics, characters, vehicles, weapons and more.

The previous "Make Something Unreal Contest" grand prize winner, Tripwire Interactive, earned over $80,000 in cash and hardware prizes throughout the contest, as well as an Unreal Engine 3 license. Tripwire's World War II shooter *Red Orchestra* was later distributed on Steam and released to retail outlets worldwide.

The competition will entail four preliminary phases and a grand final, with judging starting in June 2008 and running through fall 2009.

Contestants may enter one phase or multiple phases, and the same mod may be submitted in multiple categories and phases.

For more information on the new competition, check out **www.makesomethingunreal.com**

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EA INCREASES ITS COMMITMENT TO UE3

EA has deepened its relationship with Epic by signing a deal that gives it the right to incorporate Unreal Engine 3 into "more than five" of its upcoming titles, in addition to games already released or under development per its initial Unreal Engine 3 license agreement.

EA has utilized Unreal Engine 3 to create several cross-platform games, including *Medal of Honor: Airborne* and *Army of Two*. This new agreement represents EA's confidence in Unreal Engine 3 by providing its development teams with industry-leading tools and technologies to best serve the needs of each game.

"With the largest and most talented studio operation in the world, it's critical for us to give our studio teams the best tools they need to make great games," said EA president Frank Gibeau. "This agreement reflects our commitment to Epic's technology which, in combination with our own cutting-edge systems, allows us to create ground-breaking hits."

NCSOFT, 38 STUDIOS AND BLUEHOLE LICENSE UNREAL ENGINE 3 FOR UPCOMING MMO GAMES

NCsoft has licensed Unreal Engine 3 for two top-tier, massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs), a move that signifies its recommitment to Unreal Engine technology. NCsoft has used Unreal Engine 2 to develop *Lineage II* and *Exteel*.

"Unreal Engine 3 has a well-structured rendering pipeline, and its graphical quality is superb thanks to advanced lighting and shadowing systems," said Young-muk Choi, lead programmer, Development Unit, NCsoft.

"Tools within the Unreal Editor empower us to instantly produce and optimise our outputs, and we especially love how the engine enables designers to easily prototype concepts without the need for programming."

38 Studios, founded by legendary Major League Baseball pitcher Curt Schilling, is using Unreal Engine 3 to develop its upcoming PC MMO game, which is being art directed by Todd McFarlane and written by R. A. Salvatore.

"Epic's Unreal Engine 3 is best-of-breed, empowering developers with superior content creation tools, extensive middleware integration, and exceptional visual quality and rendering," said 38 Studios President and CEO Brett Close.

Epic has also welcomed Bluehole Studio to the Unreal Engine 3 family. Bluehole is an online game company comprised of key members from some of the foremost development and management teams in Korea, and it has licensed Unreal Engine 3 for its next-generation flagship MMORPG for PC, currently codenamed Project S1.

UPCOMING EPIC ATTENDED EVENTS:

Nordic Game
Malmö, Sweden
May 14th to 15th, 2008

Sony DevStation 08
London, UK
June 10th to 11th, 2008

GameHorizon Conference
Newcastle, UK
June 18th to 19th, 2008

E3 2008
Los Angeles, CA
July 15th to 17th, 2008

Microsoft Gamefest
Seattle, WA
July 22nd to 23rd, 2008

Casual Connect
Seattle, WA
July 24th, 2008

Please email: mrein@epicgames.com for appointments.

To discuss anything raised in this column or general licensing opportunities for Epic Games' Unreal Engine, contact: **mrein@epicgames.com**

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***Mark Rein** is vice president of Epic Games based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Since 1992 Mark has worked on Epic's licensing and publishing deals, business development, public relations, academic relations, marketing and business operations.*

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Diarmid Campbell, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe

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Jonathan Smith, Traveller's Tales
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Matthew Southern, Evolution

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Richard Lemarchand, Naughty Dog
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Tameem Antoniades, Ninja Theory
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Henrique Olifiers, Jagex Ltd.

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Networking

It may be the marvel of the modern age, but the internet can be a hairy place when dealing with time-critical applications like games. **Ed Fear** takes a look at the sector and what middleware companies are doing to help…

Ocelot.
Otacon
Wolf
Baker
Meryl

Studios need to be aware of the many problems inherent to networked titles, otherwise pitfalls can sneak up on them

When we talk about middleware normally, it's usually a case of saving you precious coding time.

For networking, though, the code is only part of the problem – there's a massive amount of back-end work that needs to be done even for the most straightforward of online games.

"If you're planning for anything beyond the basics, you're going to need both in-game code plus back-end infrastructure," says Todd Northcutt, director of GameSpy Technologies.

"That complicates the picture, both financially and operationally, for most developers and publishers – and it's also an area where an established middleware service can provide assurance and cost savings."

> ***"The strange meld of middleware company and service providers in the space proves how inseparable the problems are…"***

LIVE AND ONLINE

It's an important point, because one of gaming's latest trends is to have a social experience alongside the game, so that users can not only play against each other but also form teams or clans and share photos, videos or other user-generated content.

To put such an infrastructure together on your own, however, means you'd require only need a large amount of servers but also a team of maintenance engineers keeping an eye over the service 24/7 – not an insignificant undertaking.

"As online expectations continue to increase, producers will have to internally develop increasingly complex server code and build new capabilities more akin to enterprise IT departments," says Quazal's Henry Ryan.

"Or, they can choose to work with a trusted partner that can supply proven code and closely support the development team, and who can also deliver the long-term hosting infrastructure and services for live operations of the online game."

It's these strange melds of middleware company and service provider like Quazal and GameSpy that is become the defining characteristic of this particular sector, and simultaneously proves how large (and inseparable) the problem is.

Putting aside the back-end for a moment, there still is the issue of code to deal with. A big reason for middleware's proliferation overall is because targeting multiple platforms becomes an easier (but still daunting) prospect, but again in the networking space it's a slightly different matter. On the one hand,

opportunities

the PC is a totally open online platform and the PS3's service is deliberately 'minimal', whereas Microsoft's is more closed but provides much more of the matchmaking and connectivity functionality than its rivals. As such, it's tempting to think that you've really only got to do all the hard work for one platform – but the truth, says Ryan, is that neither platform is as open or closed as it may seem.

"Even if Xbox Live looks more like a closed solution, they provide a means for the developers to extend Xbox Live using third party servers if they want to go beyond the functionalities provided," he explains. "Features like clans and tournaments are being asked for more and more by players, and to achieve this there is a fair amount of work involved in setting up that third party hosting service to comply with Microsoft's requirements.

Life isn't any easier on the PlayStation 3 side, though. "On the PS3, even if the system looks more open, there are still a number of Sony services that developers need to integrate with, such as authentication, friends and marketplace, which have to be somehow integrated with their own services."

It's easy to think that the main battle to fight is that of lag and the general unreliability of working in a non-deterministic world, but actually there are many more issues that need just as much attention and up-front planning. Have you tested with enough routers to confidently say you've solved the huge problem of NAT negotiation? Have you load tested your servers, even if they're performing little more than lobby services and matchmaking? Have you implemented a reliable backup plan so that gamers' precious stats are protected?

THE FINAL TEST

One final warning given by Quazal is that it's crucial back-end code is comprehensively tested, as bugs have the potential to wreak far more havoc on servers than they could on the client. "Imagine this scenario: a single, difficult to replicate bug in a game that happens once in a while may lead to ten crashes a day across all the gamers that bought your game," says Ryan.

"However, if a similar bug on the back-end would make it crash ten times a day – effectively disconnecting all players – the affected number of players would be considerably higher than a client-side problem. The server is a living creature that evolves over time. The databases get bigger and the usage pattern changes, which always brings new challenges. A good design based on past experience is the key to building an evolving system."

Both Ryan and Northcutt agree that developers often underestimate the scope of the networking problem, although the situation is getting better. For this generation in particular, it's now strange for games to not have an online component, and in many of the more popular online titles it's clear that development of the multiplayer side has taken equal priority to that of the single-player.

"Developers often prioritise core gameplay and game design above figuring out anything related to multiplayer functionality," warns Northcutt. "Of course, this is a trap – as several watershed titles have proven recently, multiplayer functionality is a core component of game design and requires a lot of thought from the designers, the network coders, everyone. The online component of a game needs at least as much consideration as the single-player campaign."

CASE STUDY Q&A: ROCK BAND PRODUCER MICHAEL VERRETTE

What challenges did you face in supporting online play for *Rock Band*?

I think the biggest thing was shipping on Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 – we wanted to build a game with an online solution that would work on both platforms, and that's why we turned to middleware, because it provided that middle ground so that we could develop the features we wanted in the game and then let the middleware communicate with all of the platforms.

Also, we were growing the code team and we knew we probably weren't going to have all the network support we needed right at the start, so using a middleware provider and not just licensing the product but developing a relationship with them to help them develop features, was something we definitely were interested with. We had an arrangement where we didn't use their product out of the box, we were working with them to help them integrate the features we needed to support. It was more of a networking partnership than it was just licensing.

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Did you use them to help with the servers too?

We broke a lot of ground with *Rock Band*. The scope in terms of the amount of content and what we planned to be doing with in-game commerce – there were a lot of things that meant that having somebody with experience, that could provide middleware and hosting for us, filled a lot of roles that would have been difficult for us to do while trying to do all this other stuff.

How do you deal with lag when you're doing something as immediate as music?

We had a couple of creative solutions that are proprietary, but there are various ways around that. It isn't a server game, it's a peer-to-peer game, so there's a direct connection between the players which helps. I can't say much about the solution, but I can say that because of it lag wasn't a huge problem when building the game.

Character Building

In the first part of two-part tutorial, Axis Animation's **Graham McKenna** offers advice on for character deisgn…

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One of the biggest challenges we come across as a 3d artist is the 'character'. Striving to insert life into them can unravel a multitude of nuances which are the backbone to believability.

Over this month and the next I'll outline a few aspects I consider beneficial which hopefully allows you to make as much time for those nuances. For the purpose of the article we'll look at a creature I created at Axis for the stunning short film *Codehunters* directed by Ben Hibbon (*pictured right*).

__Graham McKenna__ is one of the co-founders of Axis Animation, and has experience in games, commercials and broadcast projects both as director, artist and supervisor.

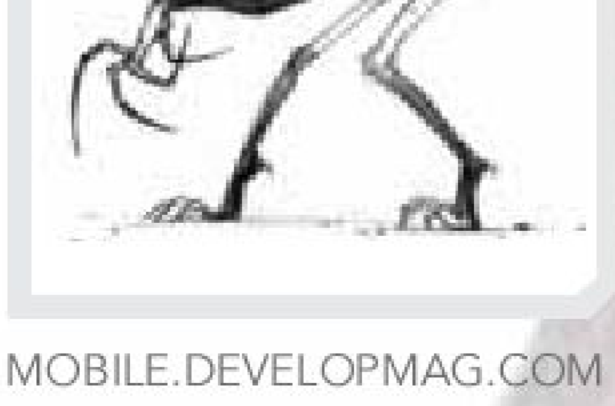
1. CONCEPTS AND DESIGN

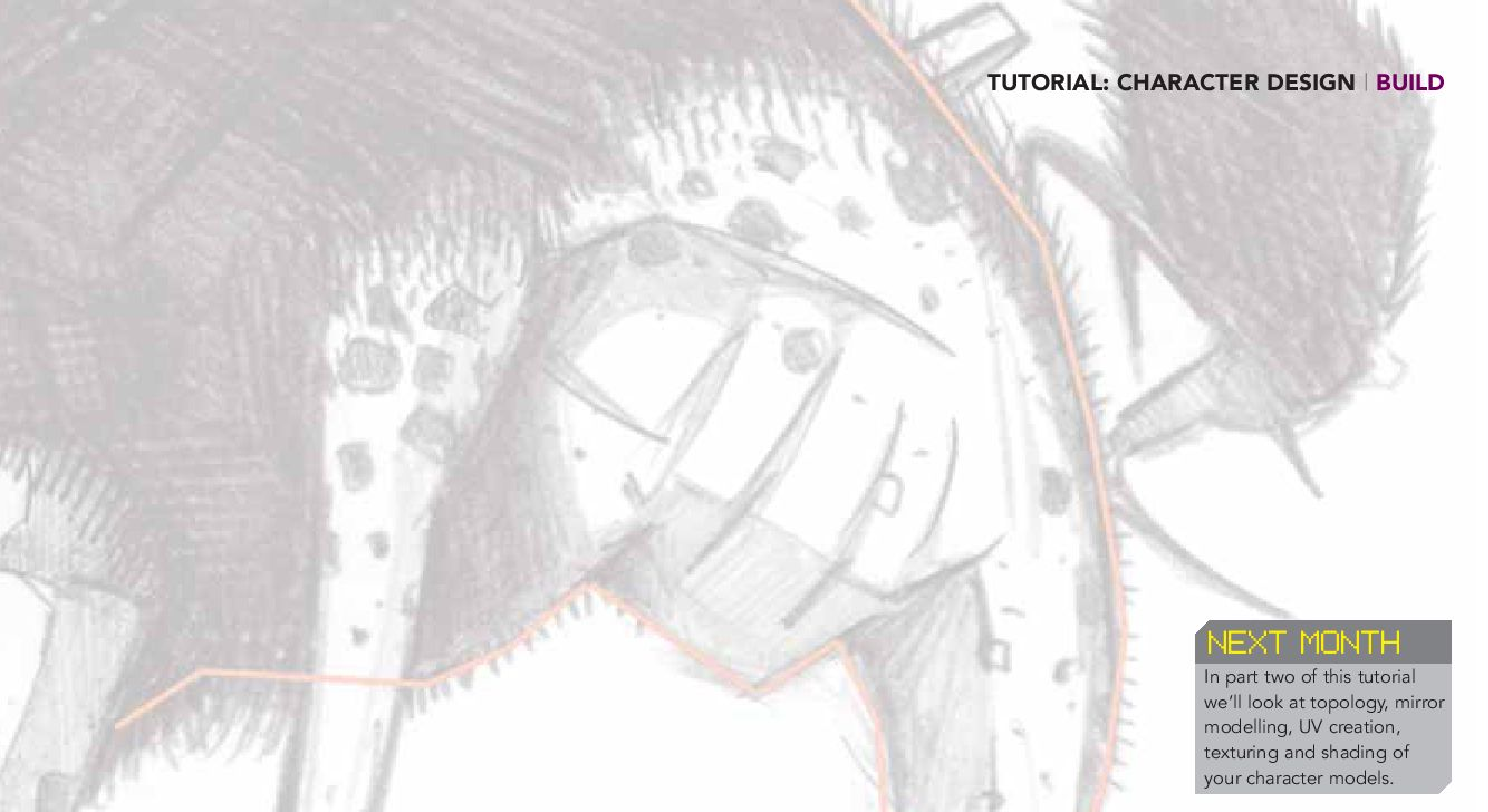
I cannot stress the importance of this first stage enough. It is the foundation from which everything else will grow.

In production these can vary dramatically, on a scale of very simple to very detailed. I prefer the latter when working with an art director as it leaves less room for interpretation when the goal is someone else's vision.

Where possible I try and get elevations of the character from front and side. This can be invaluable in terms of getting your geometry proportionally correct at an early stage, allowing you to concentrate on those details we talked about earlier.

The image below shows the concept I used for the side elevation, which I consider a good initial building block. Note the red line overlay, which I'm using to approximate the actual form of the skin underneath the fur.





2. PROXY CAGES AND WIRE CAGES

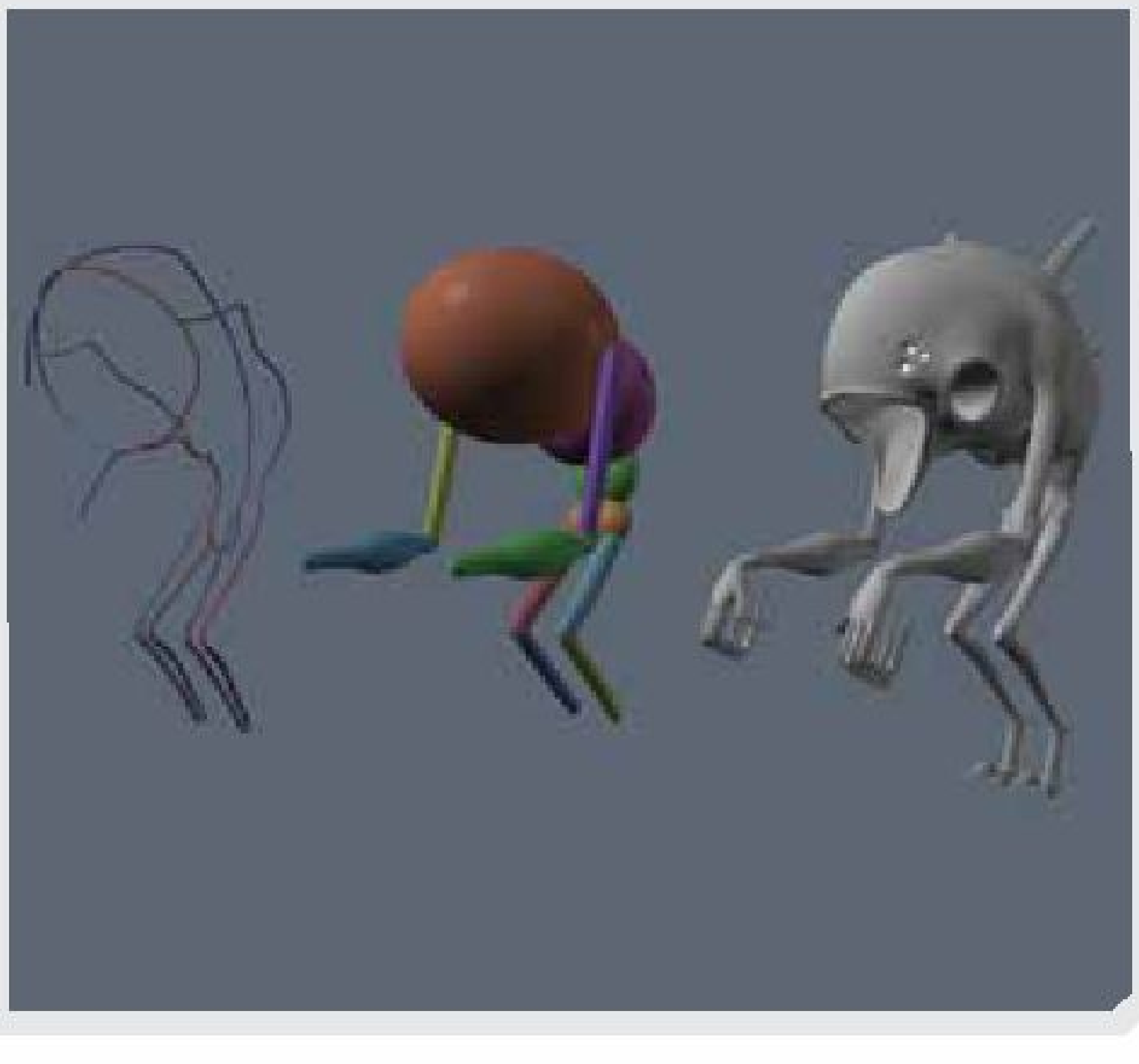
Dependant on the character I do some '3D groundwork' in the form of a simple cage. This can either be low poly count primitives or wire extrusions, whatever you find easier. The reason I find this stage beneficial is that it allows you to create a mould for that third dimension and confirm that the '2D to 3D translation' is working.

Where this is most evident is when you view the character from a three quarter/isometric view. It could be a simple height of the hip or width of the waist but I find this one technique that allows you to put those ghosts to rest early, freeing up time for those nuances.

This being said I admittedly go 'freehand' on many occasions and don't discourage it; complexity dictates the approach on most occasions. In essence you're building a template at this stage and it's worth mentioning that with some subject matter you could already have the perfect building block available to you in the form of a previous model you created.

Human characters are a perfect example; you could have spent many hours finessing a head, hand, foot etc, and with a few minor adjustments these can be massaged to suit your needs.

This is an approach I would encourage but, in this instance, the character design is quite unique so that dictates the approach. The image below shows early development of both proxy and wire cage approaches to the creature.



3. PROPORTION

Proportion can 'make or break' nailing a character, especially a human. Proportion is actually one of our nuances. The gap between a character's eyes, the face height splits, the forearm's length to the bicep's length etc.

By creating cages I outlined earlier it allows us to manipulate such aspects early creating a simple 3D template before serious modelling takes place. This can be particularly invaluable when the concept art has limited detail as I described earlier.

It should be said that although we've been thinking about proportion and manipulating it at such an early stage, it should not be forgotten about throughout the rest of the modelling process. As your mesh evolves we have the ability to finesse proportion and should always take that opportunity.

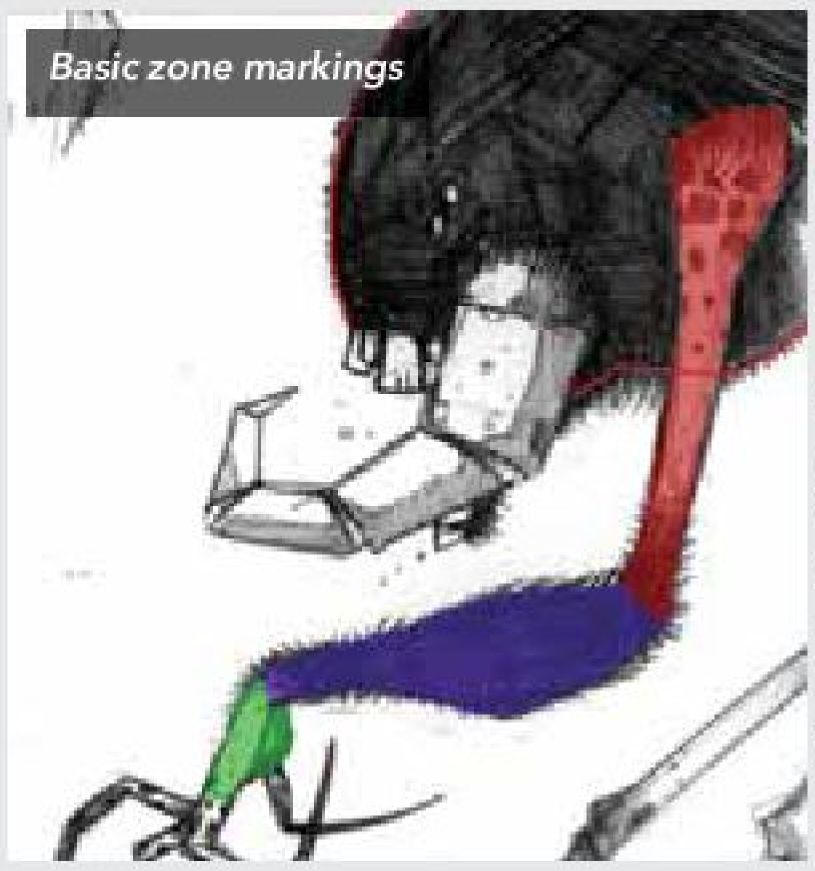
4. PRIMITIVE SHELLS BECOME ONE

Once we're happy with our 3D template it's time to move onto actually creating the geometry. In this instance what I look for next is primitive forms, the shapes that when combined, create the overall shape.

Experience has taught me it's best (and easier) to tackle zones of your mesh in isolation and then join them together at a later stage. A classic example of this is the face and modelling such aspects as eye sockets, nose, mouth and ears. and then stitching the zones together to create the overall face. By creating these zones it also allows us to do a further check on our proportions and manipulate where required with ease before we stitch it together.

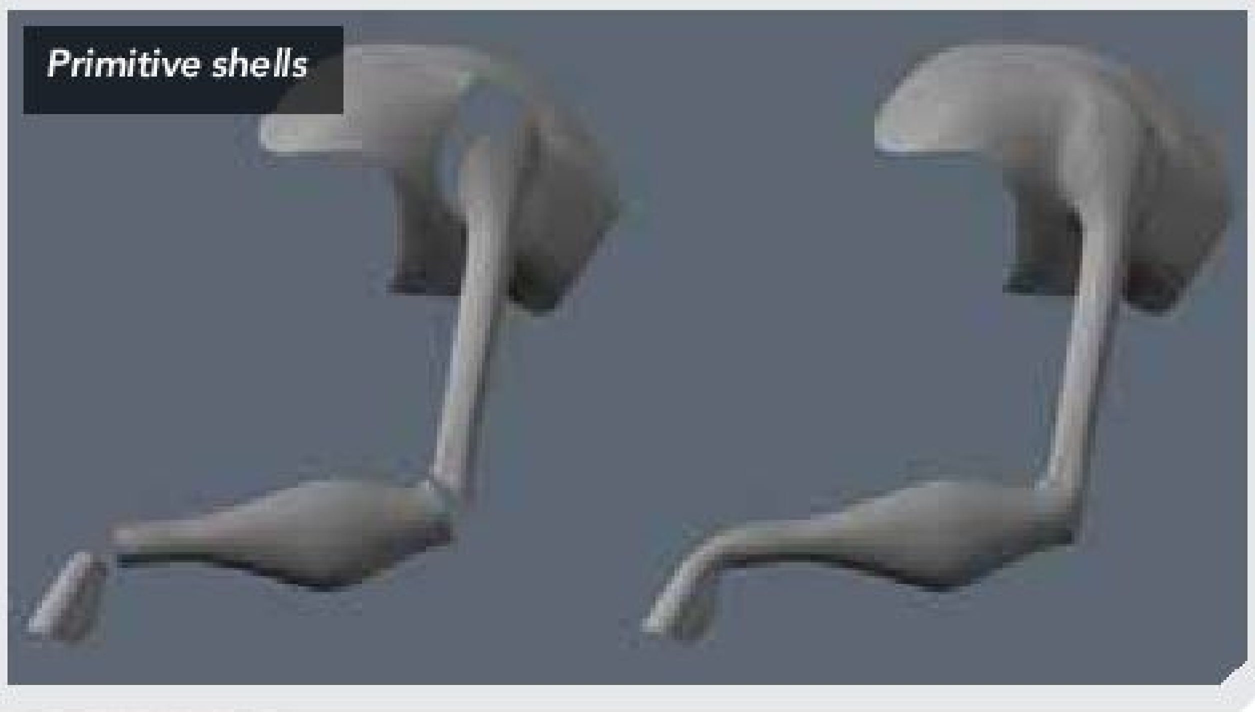
The first image below shows a technique I use on occasion before creating my primitive shells. It shows a basic 'marking' of zones on the concept art. I sometimes do this when the character is complex or off-beat (i.e. not human) or I simply want to understand it more.

Where this can be beneficial is it gets you 'thinking about what you're going to do before you do it' an aspect you should train yourself to do early in your career.



Basic zone markings

The second image below shows the creature's arm, which in basic form is two cylinders, shaped to fit our concept/cages. They are then joined together to create a continuous mesh.



Primitive shells

NEXT MONTH

In part two of this tutorial we'll look at topology, mirror modelling, UV creation, texturing and shading of your character models.

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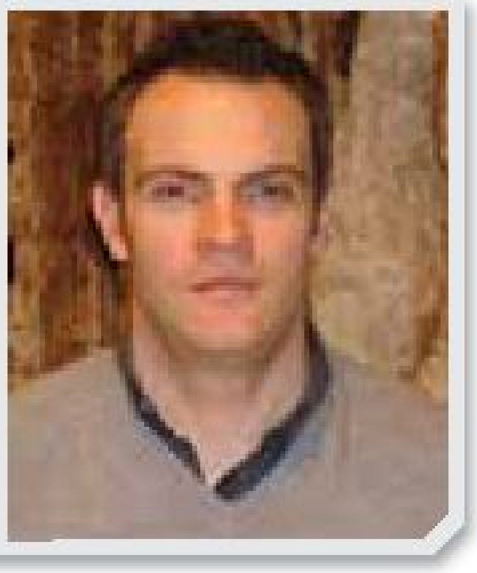

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Studio News

SPECIAL REPORT: Stats reveal Australian industry growing at a 'rapid rate'

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has published a comprehensive survey of the Australian game development market. The data takes a look at the industry between June 2006 to June 2007, examining monies earnt and spent in the development of game products.

According to the survey, there are in total 45 businesses in Australia that are involved in the game development industry, employing a total of over 1,400 people. These companies generated a total income of AU$136.9 million, 85.4 per cent of which was attributed to the provision of game development services.

79.1 per cent of this income was earned from overseas sources, and a further 1.2 per cent was received in the form of funding from the Australian government.

Breaking down this income in terms of platforms, 71.1 per cent of the income was earnt from games developed for console formats, while 14.6 per cent was accounted to games developed for the PC and Mac and a further 9.6 per cent down to the sales of handheld games.

While the industry may have generated AU$136.9 million, total expenses incurred by development studios in the same period came to AU$128.5 million – leaving an operating profit before tax of AU$8.5m, a profit margin of 6.2 per cent. Almost two-thirds of these expenses were attributed to labour costs.

The survey states that, in total, 1,431 people work in the digital game development business, 89.2 per cent of which were male. Breaking down the figures by job area, 34.1 per cent of those workers are artists or animators, while programmers account for 29.1 per cent of all Australian developers. Managerial and administrative workers made up a further 14.8 per cent of development staff, followed by designers with 9.5 per cent of the employee pool. The statistics also show that the vast majority of workers are permanent full-time employees, making up 92.6 per cent of the work force.

Almost 83 per cent of the workforce are based in the states of Queensland and Victoria (48.6 per cent and 33 per cent respectively), and similarly these two states also accounted for approximately 73 per cent of the income generated from game sales.

The Game Developers Association of Australia has used the figures to prove that the Australian development industry is growing at a rapid rate. GDAA president Tom Crago said: "We're seeing year-on-year increases of around 15 per cent, which emphasises both the strength and potential of the industry here in Australia. In an environment where many other industries are contracting, Australian game development is going from strength to strength."

However, the GDAA has also mentioned that due to the exclusion of companies ancilliary to the development of games, such as audio providers, the figures stated in the report are an underestimation of the market's true value.

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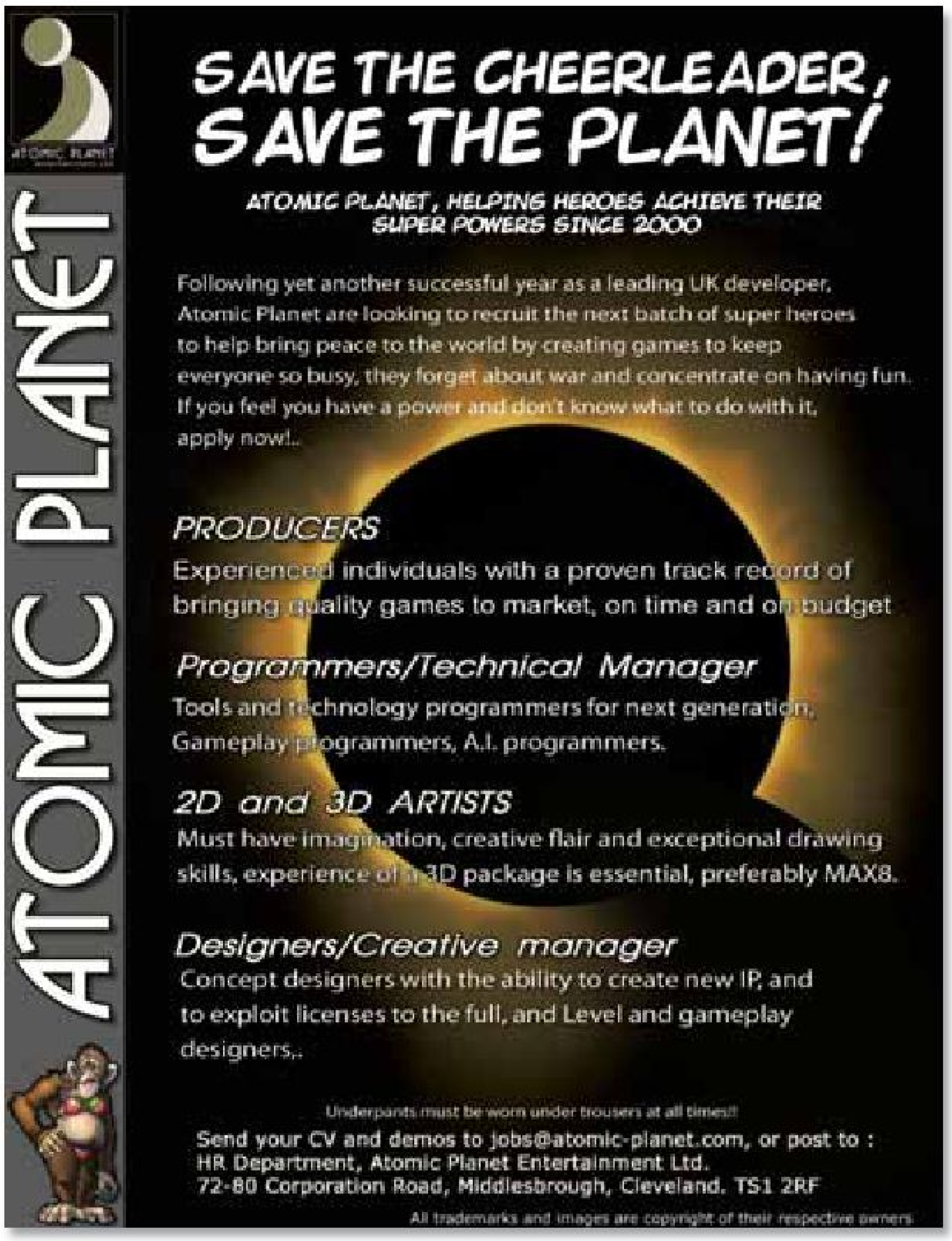

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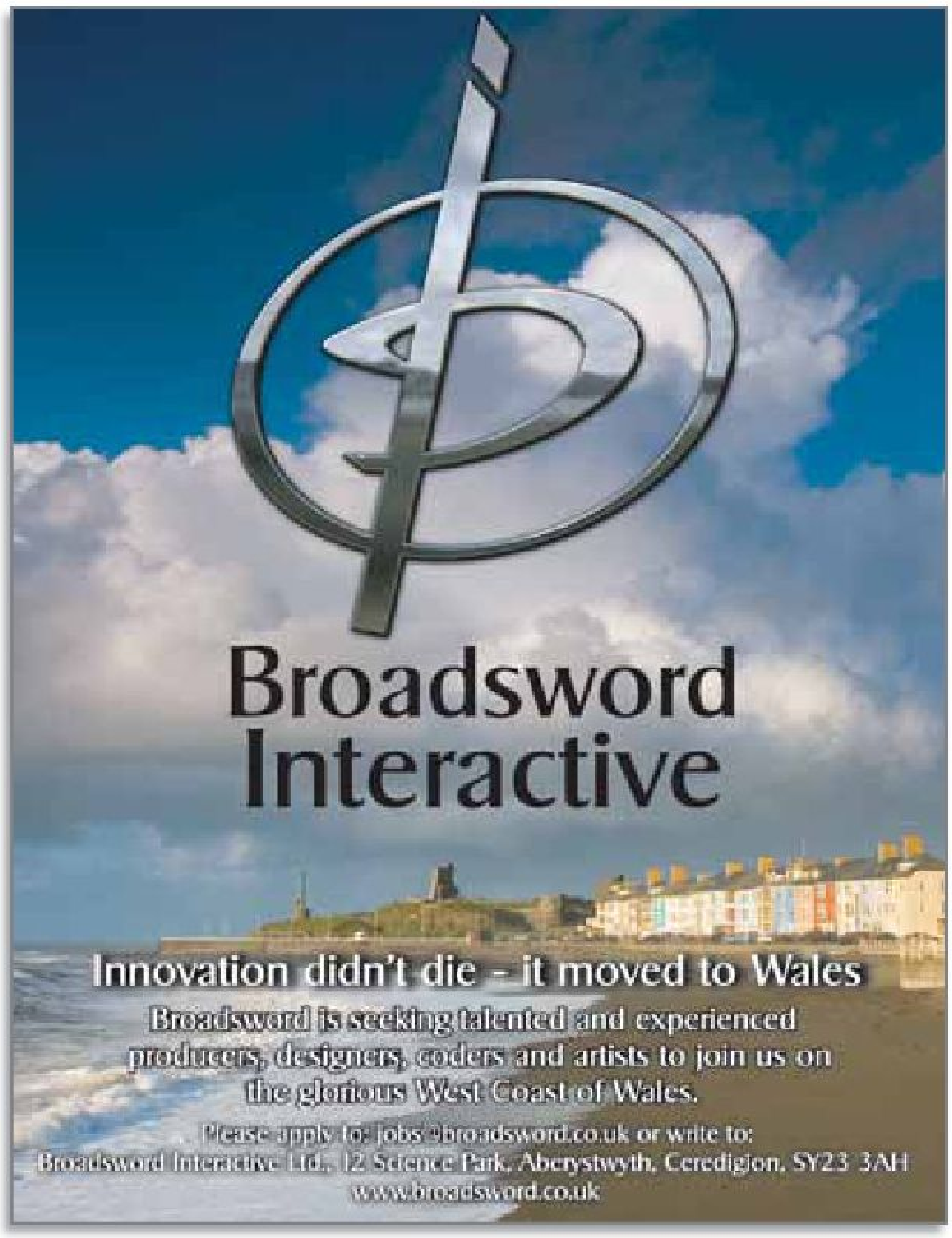

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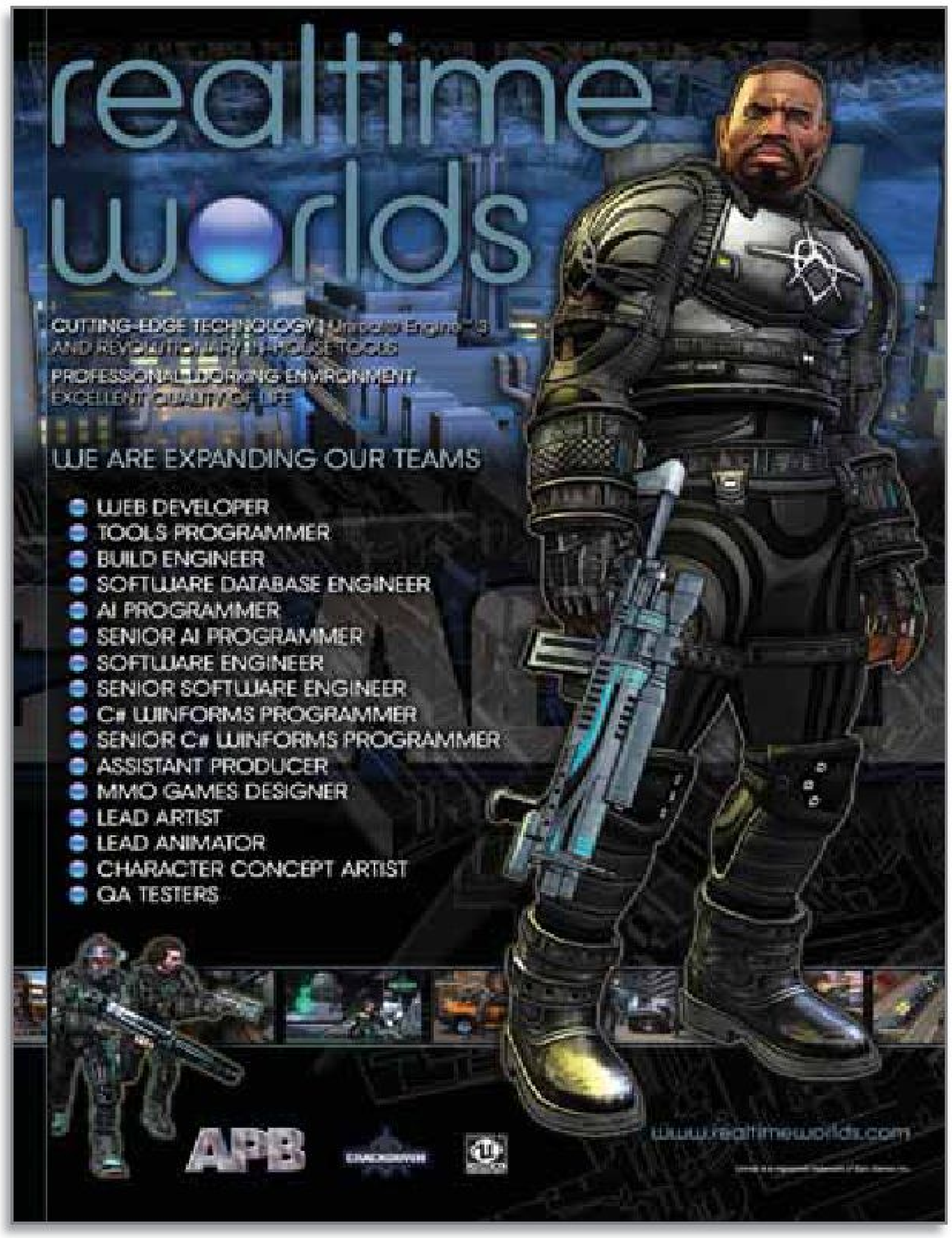

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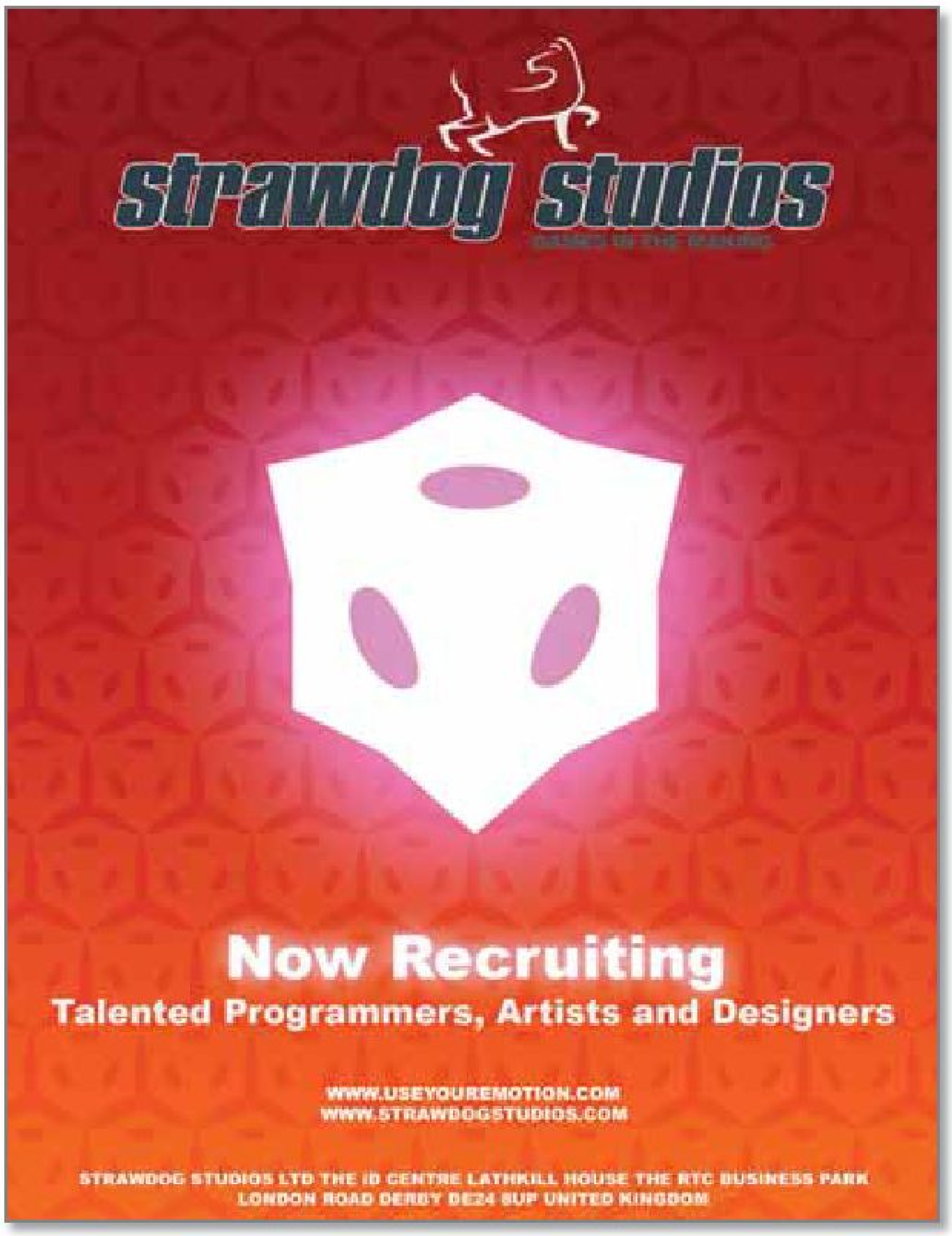
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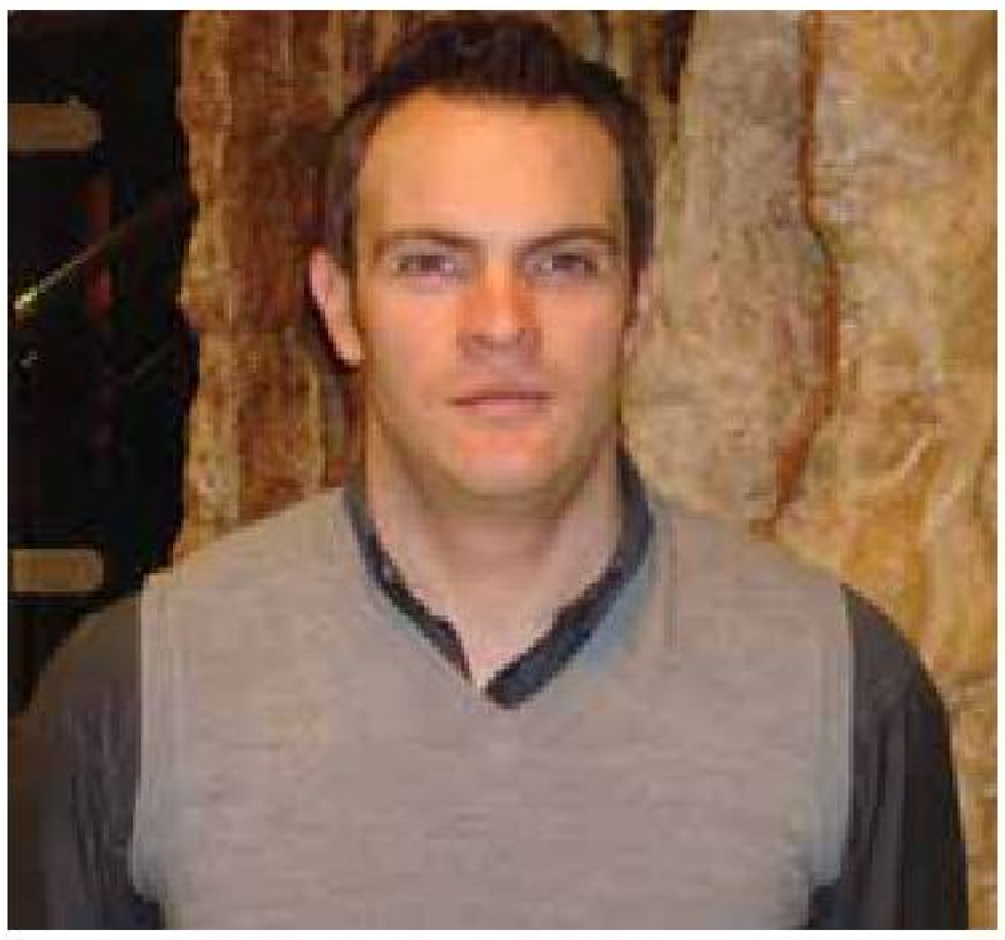
Tools News

Geomerics shines light on new sales VP



Geomerics has appointed Rob Precious as its new full-time vice president of sales.

Precious brings with him significant experience in the game middleware field, having previously worked at companies such as Criterion. He will be in charge of driving and developing global sales for Enlighten, Geomerics' new real-time radiosity technology for consoles and PCs, which is now available for evaluation after numerous years of development.

"The challenges ahead are as compelling as Geomerics' remarkable Enlighten technology", said Precious. "GDC was a spectacular success in terms of generating demand and we're now in the position to deliver evaluation versions and establish Enlighten as the leading next-generation real-time lighting solution."

Gary Lewis, CEO, Geomerics added: "We are delighted to welcome Rob as our vice president of sales. His years of experience and deep understanding of the middleware sector will be invaluable in the months to come. As such, Rob is fantastic addition to our already stellar team, which will be the driving force behind Enlighten's success."

www.geomerics.com

BLITZ CHOOSES HANSOFT

Blitz Games has signed up to use Hansoft's increasingly-popular project management solution.

The project managment and bug tracking tool has been successfully implemented at the studio to support its new projects which include a number of top secret mature projects and new casual titles.

"We were pleasantly surprised how easy it was to set it up and get the entire team to use it and really buy into it. Games are big business now, competing with budgets of films. Team sizes are rising dramatically and it's important to manage these teams as efficiently and effectively as possible and Hansoft has the perfect answer in their project management software," said Andrew Oliver, CTO at Blitz.

www.blitzgamesstudios.com

Q ADDS WII SUPPORT

Q, the next-gen middleware solution from Qube Software, now supports Nintendo's Wii. The engine is said to provide 80 per cent of a game's code but still be flexible enough so that developers can utilise only the parts that they require, essentially creating their own custom solution.

All of the core features of the engine are available on the Wii, including background data streaming, a renderer that supports arbitrary scene rendering algorithms, support for multi-gigabyte texture scenes and n-dimensional animation blending.

"We designed Q so that it's lean enough to perform well on last generation consoles and is even better on the current generation of machines," said Qube's Servan Keondjian.

"Q is an incredibly powerful tool that really brings out the best in the Wii. Q fully supports special hardware features including custom shaders through platform specific APIs.

He added: "High standards of performance and rendering quality are very important to us and we will continue to build on Q's already excellent capabilities on Wii over the coming year."

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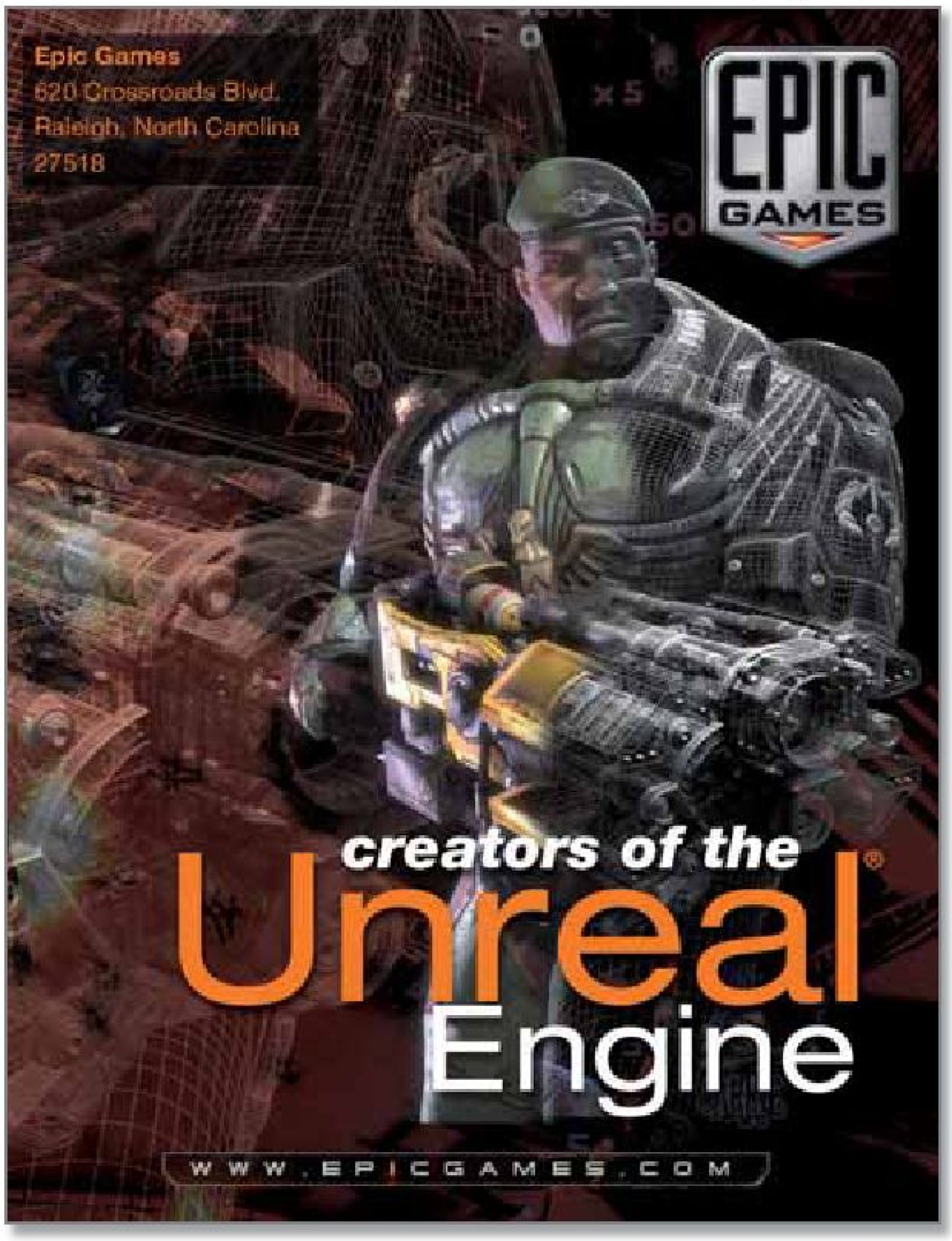

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Tool Spotlight

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Putting vibration support into games is often a last minute addition – after all, it's not like the programmers don't have anything better to do. Wwise Motion takes control of force feedback and places it in the hands of audio designers, requiring only a single line of code if Wwise is already integrated into the game.

Rumble can be associated with sounds, so that it plays as those effects do, and can even take data to control the motors from the wave files – but if greater control is required, sounds can be authored directly within the Wwise interface, where effects can be applied to modify volume, pitch and attenuation.

Just like the audio engine itself, the Motion engine works with Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii and Windows devices, including the D-BOX gaming chair. It provides the first cross-platform solution for force feedback. It also means that programmers can claw back that all-important time at the end of the project for more pressing issues.

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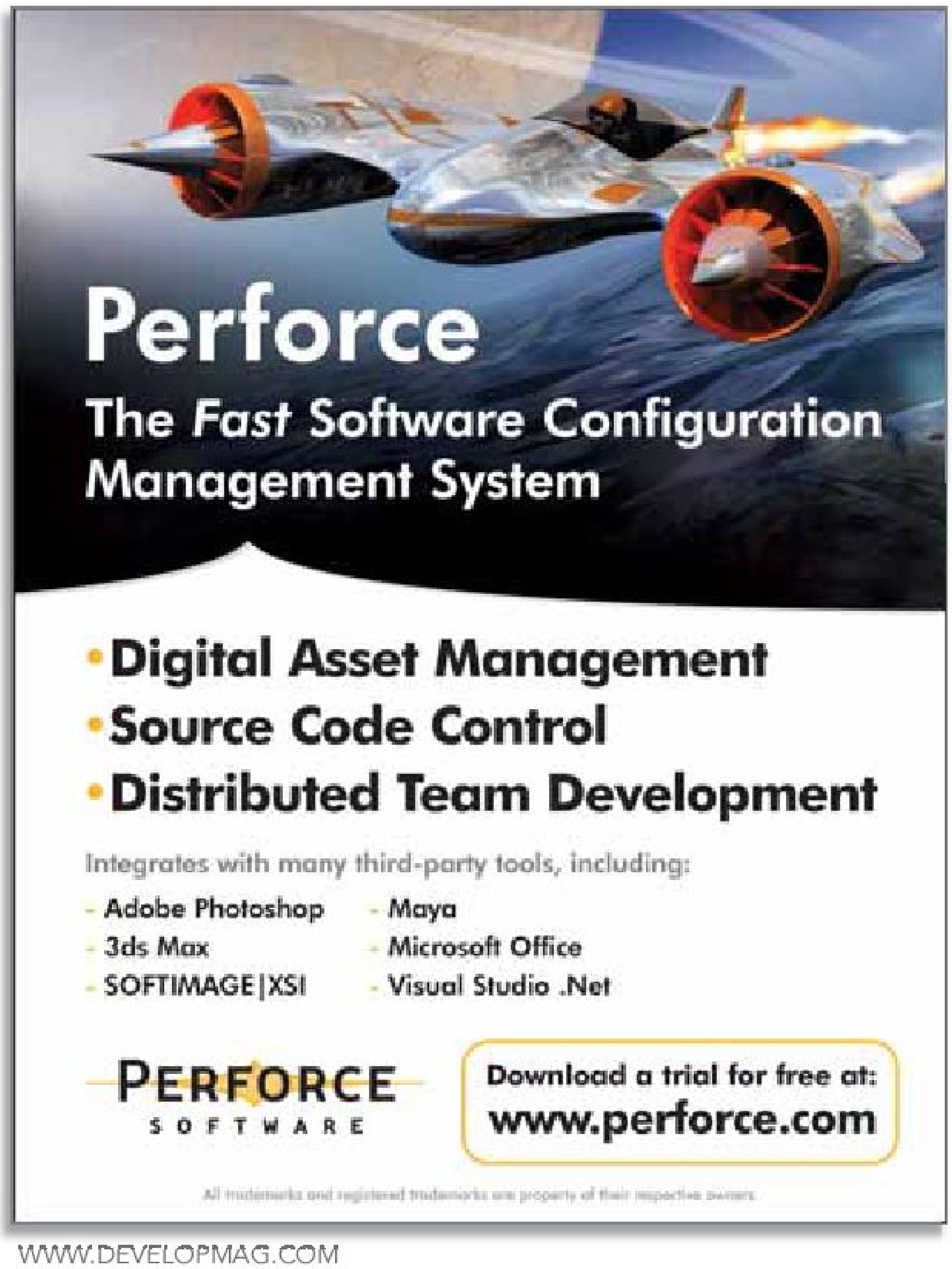

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Services News

2002 Studios enters game audio market

Audio company 2002 Studios has expanded its services range into the games market.

The studio, which has worked in the advertising space with clients such as Orange, Motorola, Vodafone and Disney, has adopted Audiokinetic's WWise and Firelight's FMOD Designer into its suite – saying that it has chosen those tools as it sees the potential for cross-platform sound design work.

2002 is looking to provide a service directly targeted at both the casual game space and small- to medium-sized developers, as these companies often lack the resources to produce sound, music or voiceovers in-house.

"We are very exited about game audio, and we feel that we have a lot that we can bring to the market," said studio owner Steven Gurevitz.

"We have a very creative team and are able to compose and produce music in a wide variety of styles, and create simple but effective sound design to suit any imagination. Our studios are fully equipped professional facilities and we have a long history of providing the very best in sound and music for visual media."

www.2002studios.com

AUDIOMOTION POWERS 10,000 BC

It might be a film set in the distant past, but getting 10,000 BC's massively populated vistas look alive took some cutting edge technology, for which Warner turned to Oxford-based motion capture specialist Audiomotion.

Directed by Roland Emmerich (of Independence Day, Godzilla and The Day After Tomorrow 'fame'), the film charts the journey of a young mammoth hunter on a journey to protect his tribe. The journey takes him through Giza, and features a huge amount of shots that required populating with up to 50,000 slaves and soldiers.

"On 10,000 BC we needed to build a comprehensive library of motion capture to drive the movements of an array of synthespians - from a single hunter to an army of thousands," said Barry Hemsley, VFX producer at Warner Bros.

The production team called upon Audiomotion, who spent several weeks with 60 of their Vicon MX40+ cameras, building a library of hundreds of variations of different movements that were then mapped onto digital characters by MPC and Double Negative. They even required mammoth blocks three metres high on a 15-by-30 metre ramp, which had to be constructed by Audiomotion to specification.

"This was definitely the largest location shoot we have executed to date. Sorting those massive props was a challenge in itself," said AudioMotion MD Mick Morris. "It was great that Roland Emmerich was there to direct personally; it's great to see a director take a personal interest in the motion capture elements of a movie. The Vicon hardware and software, as always, never let us down throughout the shooting of this movie."

www.audiomotion.com

NEW COO FOR IMAGE METRICS

Facial mocap provider Image Metrics has appointed Michael Starkenburg as its chief operating officer.

Starkenburg has previously worked with the company as a consultant for the past year, but will now be stepping up to the full-time position of guiding operations in the United States and the UK. Starkenburg has also served as a technology partner at venture capital fund the Sprout Group and CTO of Gemstar-TVGuide.

"I wholeheartedly welcome Mike on board to help us grow the company and maximise its immense potential," said Kelvin Duckett, executive VP of Image Metrics.

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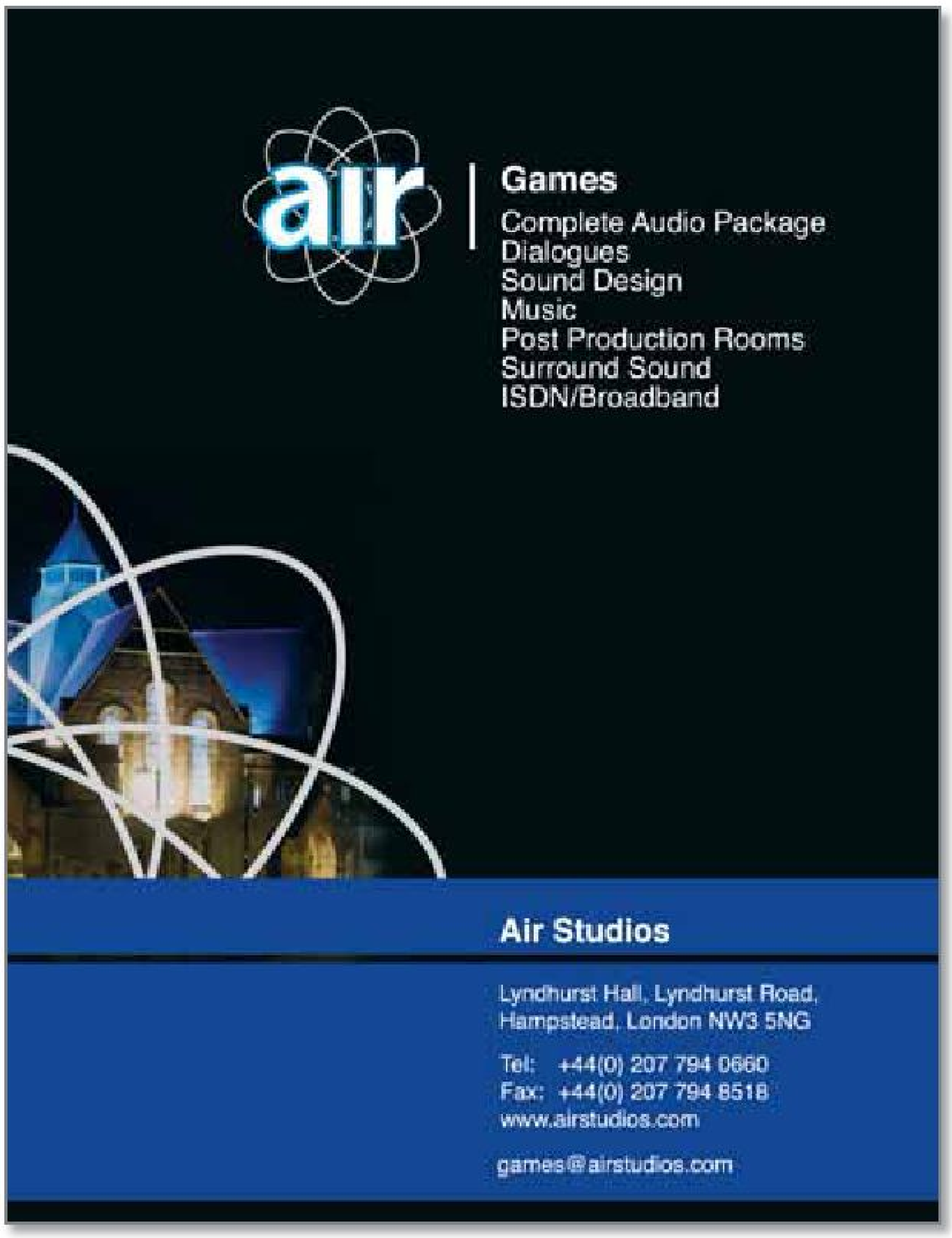

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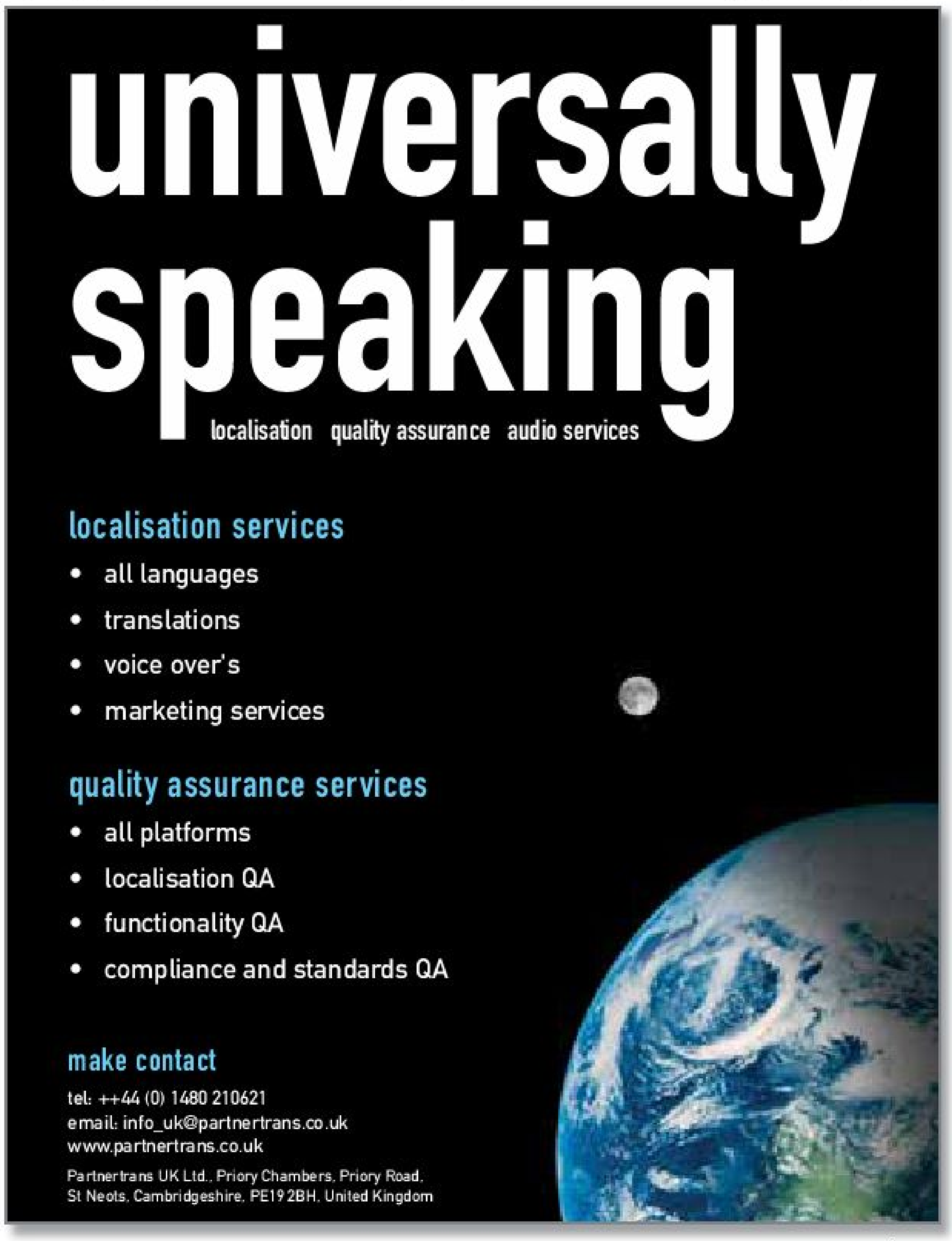

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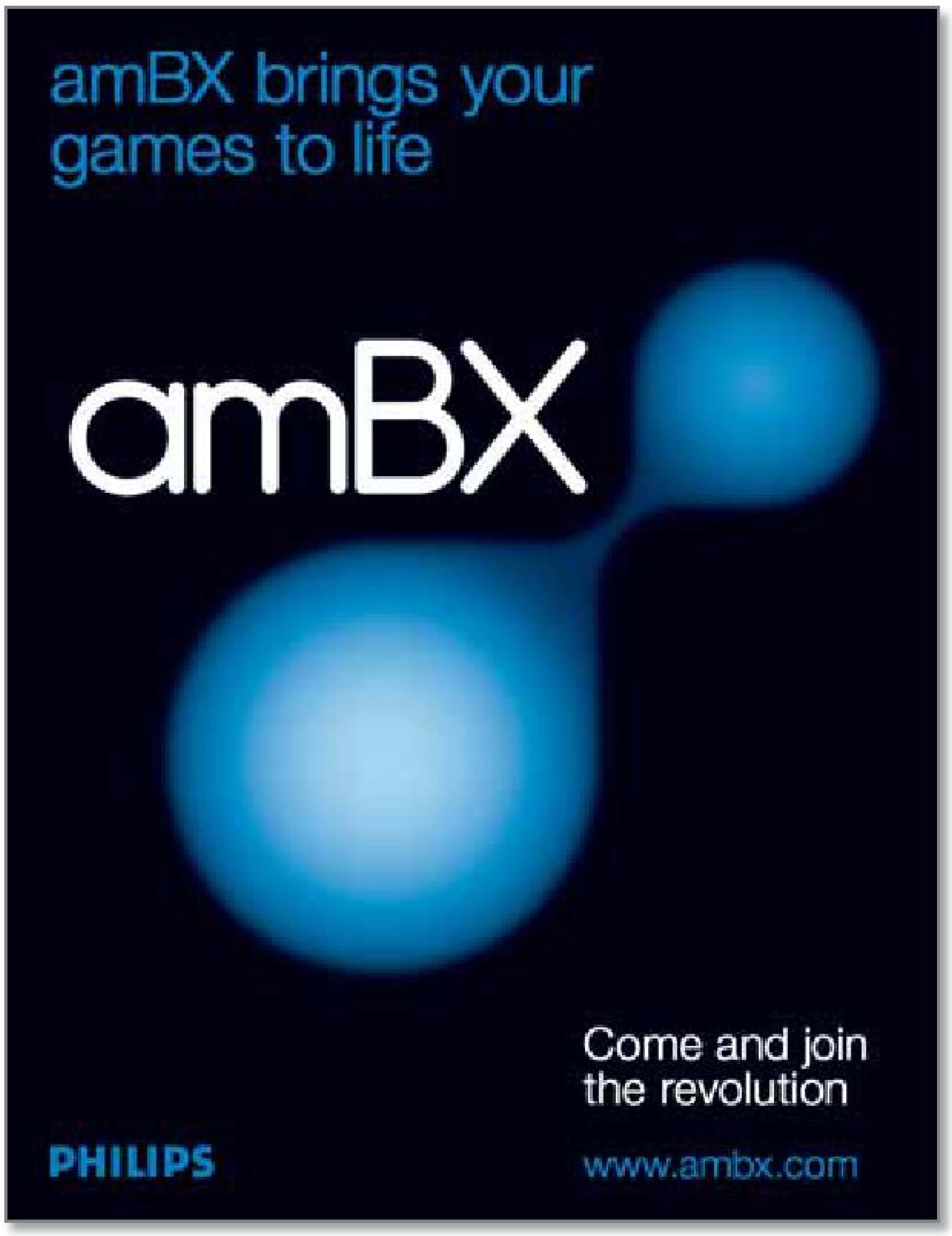

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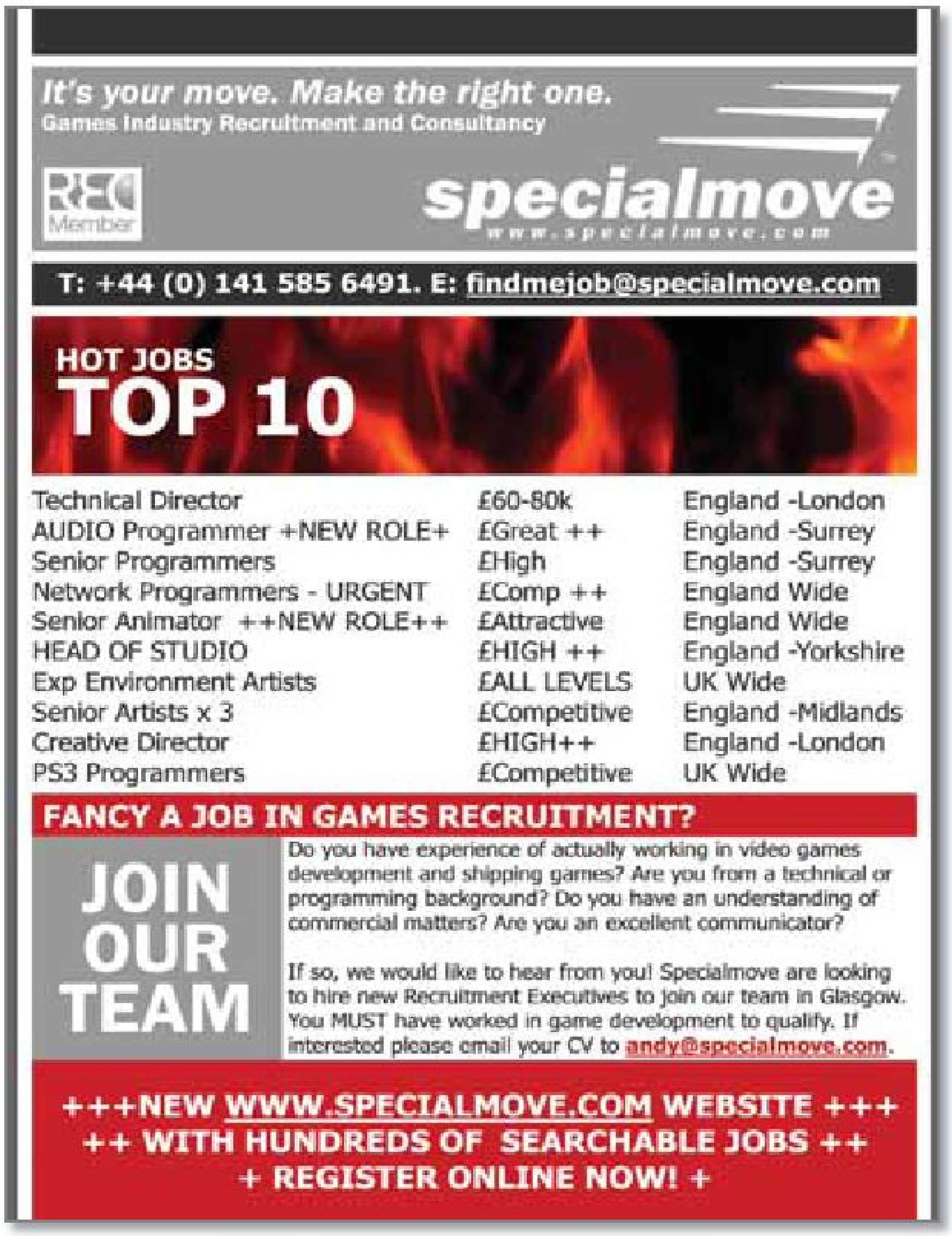

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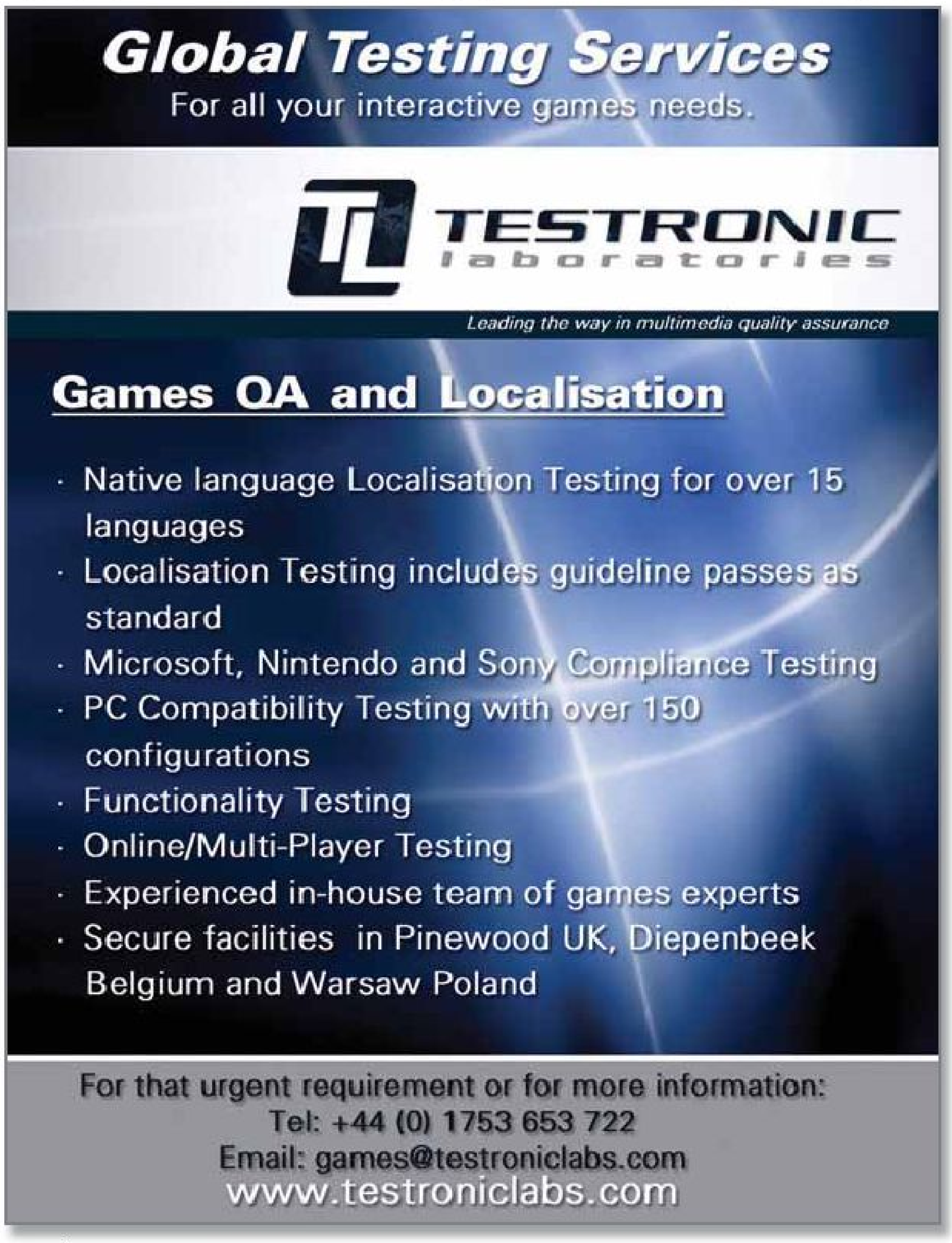

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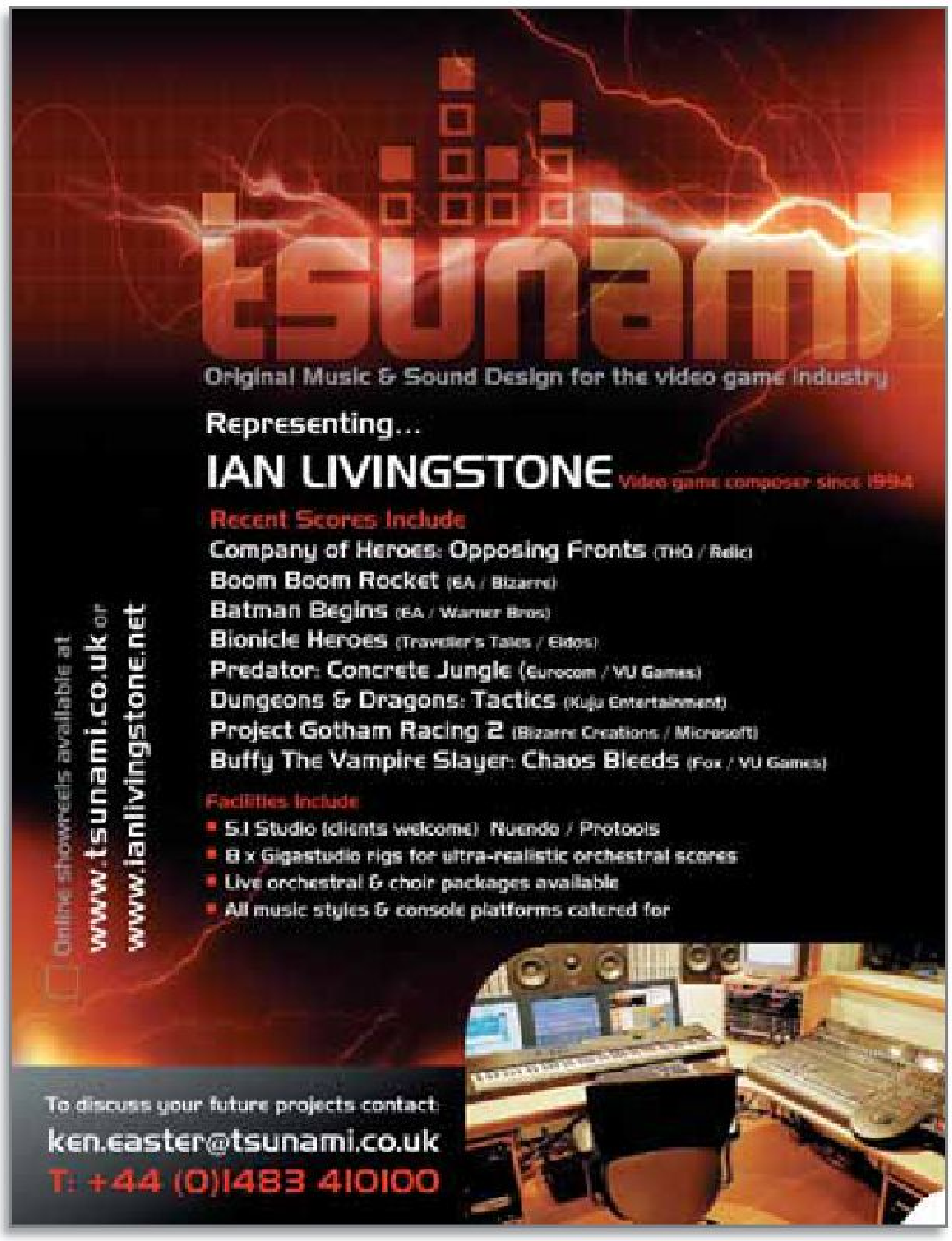

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Services Spotlight

THINK TANK STUDIOS

FACTFILE
Area of expertise: Art & visual outsourcing
Location: London
Founded: April 2000
Number of Employees: 32
W: www.thinktankstudios.co.uk

Key Personnel: Gavin J. Rothery *(art director and chief of concept)*,
Kevin Duffy *(technical art lead and chief animator)*,
Matt Carter *(chief audio engineer)*

Recent work: Numerous 'confidential' titles including a major release by a Japanese publisher

Upcoming titles: Three next-gen titles and feature film *Moon*

THERE CAN'T BE MANY more amazing starts for a business than working on a *Grand Theft Auto* game, but that's the stroke of fortune that Think Tank found itself in shortly after it launched its services.

From working on the vehicles for *Grand Theft Auto 3*, the company has continued to grow, working on many more projects for top publishers such as Microsoft, Sony and 'certain Japanese publishers' that sadly can't be named. In addition to this work in the gaming field, the studio has spread into the TV and advertising spaces, recently creating a widely-shown full CG advert for Carling's C2 alcohol-free lager as well as film pitches, concept and animatic work.

Indeed, it's this variety of services – from pre-visualisation work through to modelling, texturing and final renders – that the company is keen to show off. It says that within its team of artists are illustrators, traditional concept sculptors, digital motion artists, graphic designers, low- and high-polygon 3D modellers, traditional animators, motion capture specialists, texture artists, rendering specialists, 3D lighting engineers, web designers and programmers. That might seem like a huge array of disciplines, but art director Gavin J. Rothery says that the studio "believes in working our team members to their strengths rather than treating them as generic artists," ensuring that each person working on a job is a specialist in that field.

And it's from this talent pool that the company custom tailors a team for each project, relocating itself as necessary. "Think Tank Studios was concieved around the notion of scaleable teams of hand-picked specialists created around our clients' brief," adds Rothery, "and our talent pool is re-configured from job to job to ensure our clients get the most out of their investment."

It's also recently made its first foray into the film space, working on the British sci-fi film *Moon*, and feels that its knowledge breadth has expanded hugely thanks to the transition, which Rothery warns "wasn't an easy jump to make," and has used this know-how to develop a new type of special effects technology for the production community.

Contact
Top Floor
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SW3 5UU

Tel: (0) 7712 885 934

Email: info@thinktankstudios.co.uk
Web: www.thinktankstudios.co.uk

Training News

Game Republic showcases student talent

Game Republic, the trade association for the games sector in Yorkshire and Humber, held its first Student Showcase this week.

The event saw awards given out to students in three categories – Technical Achievement, Game Art and Game Design – judged by a panel including Rockstar North's Ian Bowden and Team 17's Martyn Brown (*pictured right with Game Design first prize winner Toby Everet*).

"The day was a success from start to finish. We set out to put the region's young development talent in the spotlight and they all played up to the occasion," said Craig Albeck, Game Republic project manager.

"The industry judges were massively impressed with the talent on show, something that was reflected in their endearing tributes to the students during the award ceremony."

www.gamerepublic.org

QANTM ADDS TWO NEW COURSES

Qantm College has had two of its new degree courses validated by Middlesex University.

It will now offer a BA (Hons) in Interactive Animation and a BSc (Hons) in Games Programming. Both courses are follow-ons from Qantm's 3D Animation and Game Design & Development diplomas respectively.

"This validation further enhances our position as the leading private educator in the Games and Animation," commented Nic Oliver, international & domestic marketing manager for Qantm College.

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Several core topics of the course include:

- Programming and Problem Solving using C++
- Computer Graphics using OpenGL and DirectX
- Linear Algebra and Matrix Operations
- 3D Modelling and Animation
- Game Development Workshop using Microsoft XNA

The course is run by an academic team with strong research activities in Computer Science and Computer Game Technology. We annually organise an international workshop to give our students early contact with the industry practitioners and enabling them to learn first hand about the challenges of working in the games industry.

Other related courses available:

MSc Computer Games Technology

BSc (Hons) Computer Animation and Visualisation

For further information on any of the above courses please contact:

Debbie Parker or Lucy Wilson
Admission and Information Officer,
Liverpool John Moores University,
School of Computing and
Mathematical Sciences,
Byrom Street, Liverpool, L3 3AF

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For more quotes from ex-students, examples of student work and syllabus information please visit www.mscgames.com.
PhD and BSc study also available.

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THE BYRONIC MAN

Simon Byron wishes he'd been warned…

It's easy to slag off Windows. It's clunky, bloated, continually targeted by virus makers, laden with prohibitively restrictive DRM, expensive, error-prone software – but at least it's overly cautious. You can barely do anything within the operating system without clicking through a bazillion warning messages, asking – just one more time – are you sure you want to do that? Really sure? Really.

If it was designed with any sense of humour, it'd follow this with little dialogue boxes stating "Hmmm… I wouldn't do that if I were you," "I think that's probably going to ruin the system," and other assorted brain-niggling seeds of doubt. But it's not designed with any sense of humour. Because it's a clunky, bloated, continually… etc.

Life should come with similar dialogue boxes, to give you the opportunity to pause before embarking on something with potentially disastrous ramifications. Honestly, is putting a road cone on your head that hilarious? Do you really want to text her while you're pissed? Is dancing now really a good idea?

If iTunes was honest, it'd certainly introduce some sort of are-you-sure-you-wanna? pop-up activated after the pubs shut. Honestly, the amount of times I've woken up in the middle of the night slumped over my keyboard having purchased an iPod full of Adam and the Ants… well, it's one. But it still cost me shitloads. And worse of all, I've felt compelled to leave them on my iPod because, you know, it's actually been paid for. That's my actual excuse.

> ***"If the PlayStation Network really did want to be as user-friendly as it pretends, it'd have a similar warning notice…"***

And if the PlayStation Network really did want to be as user-friendly as it pretends, it'd have a similar warning. And that warning would read, simply: "Don't buy *Gran Turismo*.

What an absolute farce. Maybe it's some sort of childish loyalty, rose-tinted irises thing, but even when you're going through the additional hassle of topping up your PlayStation funds to cover the whopping 25 (twenty-five) pounds (pounds) the thing costs – the perfect moment for a what-are-you-doing? headslap – you'll still continue like some mindless Sony-sucking nob-gobbler, dribbling with misplaced optimism at the opportunity of playing a demo being sold to you for a quarter of a hundred pounds; the sort of figure that tends to make the prices Future Publishing charges seem charitable by comparison.

It doesn't matter if you're using some futuristic pipe made entirely from space and fused directly from your PlayStation 3 to Sony headquarters – the fast service that doesn't stop at stations like Porn or Spam – it'll still take longer to download than it would to order and get delivered from Gameplay.com. And – here's the really nut-busting fact you'll realise in the morning – downloading it directly to your PlayStation 3 hard-drive, doing away with packaging and manuals and all the nice things games collectors want stacked on their shelves, will actually cost you seven pounds more than owning the actual physical box.

But that doesn't matter, because you can leave the download running overnight, so you'll be able to play it the following day, immediately after waking up from your petrol-fuelled dreams featuring the world's most beautiful vehicles making sweet beautiful love to each other. Except you won't be able to, because some numbskull at Sony or Polyphony or wherever decided that as soon as the game was finished it wasn't actually finished, so you'll need to download a massive patch before you're allowed to do anything meaningful, and this patch won't download until you've made three aborted attempts to obtain the bloody thing. This'll take you at least a couple of hours. Are you having fun yet? Are you?

Then you'll realise that the patch is essentially a delaying tactic, designed to keep hope alive. Because once you actually get into the thing, you'll remember how frustratingly obstructive the *Gran Turismo* games are, holding all the promise back until you've completed an endless list of dull-o-vision races and challenges. It's basically like buying a Muse album but being told you can't listen to the best bits – i.e. all of it – until you've learnt to play the guitar. Annoying, is what.

So seriously, don't bother. Play *Riff* instead because it's genuinely brilliant and a real illustration of what downloadable PSN games should be like. Not like this pile of po-faced drivel. Are you sure you want to download it?"

simon@thetriforce.com

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Publication date: June 10th
BUILD Feature: Physics
BUILD Guide: AI
Events: Paris GDC, GameHorizon

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DEVELOP CONFERENCE AND EXPO – SPECIAL ISSUE
Publication date: July 8th
BUILD Feature: Procedural content tools
BUILD Guide: Game audio

AUGUST 2008

Publication date: August 12th
BUILD Feature: 3D modelling
BUILD Guide: UI Engines
Event Distribution: GCDC

SEPTEMBER 2008

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT MARKETS – SPECIAL ISSUE
Publication date: September 8th
BUILD Feature: User interface tools
BUILD Guide: MMOG Engines

OCTOBER 2008

Publication date: October 6th
BUILD Feature: Face/body graphics
BUILD Guide: 3D modelling

NOVEMBER 2008

Publication date: November 10th
BUILD Feature: Security
BUILD Guide: Networking

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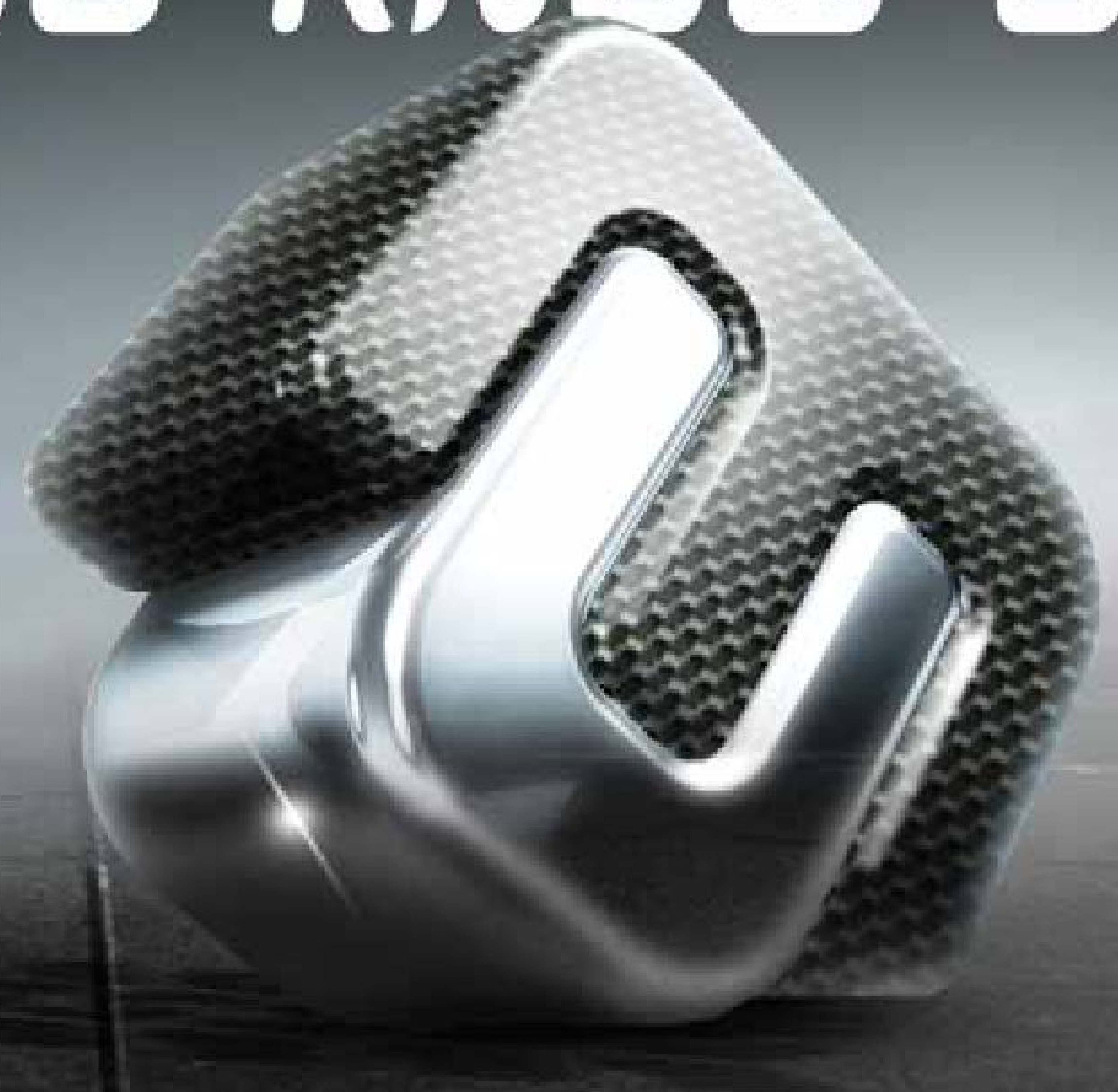

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